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BOOK REVIEWS

Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles, and Guidelines, by D. Randy Garrison & Norman D. Vaughan. Published by Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2008 (245 pages).

D. Randy Vaughan is the director of the Teaching and Learning Centre and a full professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary. Norman D. Vaughan is the coordinator for the blended learning program in the Teaching and Learning Centre at the same University.

Blended Learning in Higher Education is about the paradigm of integrating the strengths of face-to-face and online learning, redesigning the courses in higher education to optimize student engagement in learning. The book is divided into two parts and includes nine chapters. Part one focuses on understanding the community of inquiry framework and describes how it can influence practice and professional development. The emphasis is on blended learning that addresses the ideals and values of higher education in terms of creating and sustaining communities of inquiry. The communities of inquiry framework set the boundaries for understanding the nature, purpose, and principles of blended learning. Blended learning seems a simple concept but its application presents challenges in terms of disciplinary content, levels of instruction, and course goals.

Part two is the most interesting because it offers scenarios of a blended learning environment, as well as practical guidelines, specific strategies, and tools that can be used to engage students in learning. This part of the book presents practical guidelines and strategies for readers who want to implement blended learning. The scenarios in chapter five are particularly interesting because they reflect successful blended learning designs associated with types of courses common in higher education and adapted for the major courses. There is also a discussion about the original design of the course, with its difficulties, and how it became after being redesigned to be a hybrid course.

Furthermore, the appendix provides a full range of resources, practical tools related to the implementation of blended learning in higher education.

October 2008, Vol. 11, No. 2

These include a template for preparing a blended learning course outline and a redesign guide for blended learning.

Surveys revealed that 80 percent of all higher education institutions offer blended learning because of its advantage in enhancing the learning experience. As we know, information technology has been widely used in higher education level and oftentimes has replaced the face-to-face interaction in teaching and learning. This book fits well in this field because integration of the two is more important. According to findings, “94 percent of lecturers believed that blended learning is more effective than classroom based teaching alone.” (p. 4).

Each chapter of the book includes an overview section, in which a short summary is helpful to the reader. The conclusion of each chapter has a summary of the main points, as well as a short transition to the next chapter.

While the whole first part of the book is dedicated to the theory of community of inquiry framework, it would seem that one chapter would have been enough to talk about it and consecrate the rest of the book to the blended learning in practice because the practical part matters more. As we know, there is still a lack of understanding of how best to use technology to advance the goals of higher education in term of engaging students in critical thinking discourse. Because this theoretical part of community of inquiry framework is long, the reader may skip it and go directly to the practical ideas in the second part.

The authors’ style is formal, suitable for the intended audience of educators, administrators, and higher education students. These authors are encouraging teachers and administrators to redesign blended learning to return to the ideals of higher education because, as we all know, change is needed. For them, what is important is an integration of the strengths of face-to-face and online learning to address worthwhile educational goals. This book will be very useful for faculty who want to integrate information technology into their teaching experience. Students may benefit from this book to know what blended learning is as they are exposed to it.

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International Forum

Take the Risk: Learning to Identify, Choose, and Live with Acceptable Risk, by Ben Carson and Gregg Lewis. Published by Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008 (236 pages).

From the desk of the world-renowned Adventist neurosurgeon Ben Carson, comes his fourth book *Take the Risk*, bringing surprising research findings combined with personal experiences on the theme of risk-taking. Set against the backdrop of his medical profession, specifically surgery, where risk-taking is often a life-and-death issue, Carson shares his views and formulas for taking calculated, well-thought-out risks for achieving success in one's own life and for the good of others, and invites the reader to join him on the journey.

Take the Risk resembles an autobiography of a neurosurgeon whose life is filled with amazing moments of risk-taking. The event that motivated him to write this book was a surgical risk that he and his team took, with conjoined twins, the Bijani sisters. Sensational descriptions of this surgery in the first three chapters lead the reader to the real issue of taking risks and considering the cost.

Carson continues this intriguing theme with examples from his neurosurgery experiences in the subsequent chapters, emphasizing that life itself is a risky business in this post-modern society. From untied shoelaces to unexpected shark attacks, Carson presents sobering research on diverse health hazards with their associated risk statistics in chapter five and asks important questions such as "What risks do we really need to worry about?" and "How do we decide what risks are acceptable?" (p. 54). He admonishes the reader not to take the path of no risk which results in a person, not managing to do anything of true significance in life, yet on the other hand, he is careful to advise against taking the path where one takes all the wrong risks and ends up hurting oneself and others.

The heart of the matter of risk is discussed in chapter eight, where Carson presents his "prescription," and illustrates how it works by using graphic personal example from his own encounters with cancer, and the options that he had to carefully weigh. With incredible clarity he describes how to purposefully assess and accept risks. The prescription crystallizes into the four questions that he calls the "Best/Worst Analysis (B/WA) formula" (p. 105). These four questions (p. 105) that would assist anyone in the decision-making process in relation to risky situations are:

- What is the *best* thing that can happen if I *do* this?
- What is the *worst* thing that can happen if I *do* this?
- What is the *best* thing that can happen if I *do not* do it?
- What is the *worst* thing that can happen if *do not* do it?

The rest of the book provides apt examples from his life and others on how to use these questions in one's personal and professional life. With his background of medicine in a western society, Carson agonizes over the sad state of affairs of education in the United States over the past decade. He cites an example derived from the statistics of 2004, which shows that US institutions of higher learning graduated 60,000 engineers—40% of whom were foreign, while China produced 392,000 of its own. He urges the country to “find a way to maximize our intellectual talent because we occupy a special place in the world” (p. 206). Though this statement may be puzzling to a non-US reader, Carson clarifies why he says that. He considers US as the child of many other nations as it is a country made up of people from these different countries. This, he says, places a special obligation on the US to lead the rest of the world in providing global leadership. He then works out a B/WA analysis to conclude that the risk of keeping the nation in a position of leadership is worth the effort.

Carson gives an example from his own personal life of ways of helping with the above issue. He describes the “risk” he and his wife Candy have taken (after using the B/WA formula) in setting up the Carson Scholars Fund for students from primary grades onwards. Investing in people through this scholarship is a risk that has brought many dividends in terms of students who have the potential to become “*very* productive members of society” (p. 215). He encourages the readers to take risks through investing in people by giving more than money, but by giving of “yourself, your time, and your efforts” (p. 215). This is advice that all Christian professionals can use.

Educators and psychologists are well-acquainted with the identifying marks of children at-risk for failure. Interestingly, Carson qualified in multiple ways, as a young boy, to become such an at-risk child, with such characteristics as being: (1) a black, (2) male, raised in (3) poverty in a (4) ghetto culture on the (5) streets of urban Detroit and Boston, the product of a (6) broken home headed by a (7) poorly educated and (8) very young (9) single mother who had (10) no professional training or job skills (p. 67). But despite a life filled with inherent risks, Carson found his life taking a different turn than the one he seemed destined for.

One of the highlights of this book is chapter 15 entitled, “Parenting Perils?” He describes parents’ roles as two “seemingly conflicting assignments: protecting and pushing” (p. 191). His admonition for raising children, especially teenagers, is to avoid being *helicopter parents*, a term that refers to those parents who are constantly hovering (physically and figuratively) over their children. As the most significant persons in children’s lives, parents are encouraged to use the B/WA formula during times of crisis in the process of bringing them up. He admonishes parents to use the most useful weapon—the brain—and says, “The

first order of business may be for us parents to use ours to teach our kids to use theirs” (p. 203).

One can understand the above possibility in the context of Carson’s life, as he attributes much of his life success to his mother. The snippets of his childhood experiences, though familiar to those who have read his other best selling books, *Gifted Hands*, *Think Big*, and *The Big Picture*, provide support to his prescription. It is not surprising that Carson is a successful multi-faceted professional as he follows his own advice with above average performance. (He modestly refers to his track record of having performed an average of 450 brain surgeries a year while the general average of private practitioners is around 150). In addition to this, he is busy with research and publishing, something that requires incredible adjustments in schedule. He is also a full professor in four disciplines: neurosurgery, oncology, pediatrics, and plastic surgery, yet engages in “extracurricular” activities such as public speaking especially for young people.

Take the Risk provides myriad valuable suggestions for professionals, both in their personal and working lives. Personally, I find *Take the Risk* a must-read for all professionals. In life, where risk-taking is a daily occurrence, the guidelines and examples that Carson gives can help readers take acceptable risks that will reveal the true purpose of their lives. As Christian professionals who may have an impact on the destiny of lives that we touch, Carson’s prescriptions for risk-taking are worth sharing with others.

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Direct Marketing in Action: Cutting-Edge Strategies for Finding and Keeping the Best Customers, edited by Andrew R. Thomas, Dale M. Hauser, and Linda M. Foley. Published by Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, 2006 (217 pages).

All four editors are on the faculty at the University of Akron. Andrew Thomas has experience as a global entrepreneur in 120 countries. Dale Lewison wrote *Retailing and Market Management*, currently in its sixth edition. William Hauser teaches courses in creative marketing, as well as marketing analysis and research. Linda Foley’s primary research area is marketing strategy. Authors of the chapters are professionals in marketing.

The authors note that in order to have a good marketing strategy, various factors should be considered; for example: competitive analysis, information management, media and channel selection, brand loyalty creation, and the measurement of results. Of prime importance, in order to be prepared to manage challenges, is knowing the competition.

Another group about whom knowledge is important is that of the customer. Good information management is needed in order to gain knowledge of customer behavior. Direct channels permit access to customers, regardless of organizational size. Using fulfillment programs and providing exceptional service enhance customer retention. The authors explain that direct marketing is driven by customer needs, and requires focused, specific communication. A twelve-step program for developing a successful strategy is presented.

Today's customers have high expectations for service, quality, and responsiveness. This book suggests that mass marketing to anonymous potential clients no longer gets results. Companies are discovering that they must invest more than before in direct communication with customers if they hope to remain competitive. At the same time, consumers tend to associate direct marketing with intrusive door-to-door salesmen, phone solicitations, junk mail, and most recently e-mail spam. All this has given direct marketing a negative reputation.

Examples of successful direct marketing would be the dentist who sends check-up reminders to patients or hotels that customize room amenities based on their guests' profiles. This kind of direct marketing works on the basis that the best allocation of the marketing dollar focuses on and communicates with a particular micro market and reinforces the distinctive benefits provided to the customers.

The book also considers the issue of evaluation and provides valuable information to help point out specific areas for improvement. The chapters of *Direct Marketing* bridge the gap between research and practice. Terms and concepts are clearly defined and numerous examples are featured. The format is such that the book may be read cover to cover or in modular fashion.

Direct Marketing in Action can serve as a handbook for marketers or a comprehensive overview for students, teachers, and researchers. It is a good addition to one's business library.

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