

Book Review – Distance and Blended Learning in Asia

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Book Review

Distance and Blended Learning in Asia

Authors: Latchem, C. and Jung, I. (2010). [Distance and Blended Learning in Asia](#). New York/London: Routledge.

Reviewer: Tony Bates, on October 5th, 2009¹

This is one of the best books I have read recently on distance education, and it has lots of good material on e-learning in Asia as well. It casts its net amazingly wide, from Turkey and Syria in the west through Mongolia, Afghanistan, India, and China to Indonesia, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines and everywhere in between – yes, including Myanmar and Bhutan. All this is accomplished within about 300 pages of very readable text.

I strongly recommend this book to everyone with an interest in e-learning and distance education, and especially those in Asia, but it will also be of particular value to African institutions as it provides some clear pointers for how e-learning and distance education can be, and has been, developed in less economically advanced countries. There are also some important messages for institutions in North America and Europe, as I will discuss later. But first, let's look in more detail at what this book covers.

Contents

Chapter 1: Technology, E-Readiness and E-Learning Readiness

This chapter provides data and information on the state of technology access for nearly all Asian countries in terms of mobile phones, Internet access, and world rankings for e-readiness and e-learning readiness, and it outlines different national strategies in these areas. There is a fascinating section in this chapter about cultural differences in the use of technology.

Chapter 2: Open Schooling, SchoolNets, and ICT Integration in Classrooms includes a detailed analysis of success and failure characteristics of ICT integration in the K-12 school sectors across Asia.

Chapter 3: Higher Education

This chapter includes a section on the 33 open universities in Asia, another section on dual-mode, blended, and cross-border institutions, followed by a section on the *Third Wave*, recent newcomers to e-learning and distance education. The final section is a critical look at the challenges facing distance and blended learning in Asian higher education.

Chapter 4: Lifelong Learning, Workplace Training, Professional Development and Nonformal Adult and Community Development

This chapter has sections on policy, planning, and provision for lifelong learning, workplace training, gender issues, and basic and nonformal adult and community education. It ends with a set of lessons learned.

Chapter 5: New Providers and New Markets

This chapter includes discussion of virtual/cyber institutions in Asia, of which there are many more than I expected especially but not exclusively in South Korea and Malaysia, national and international consortia, partnerships and networks, national for-profit providers, and a final section of conclusions, again analysing success and failure factors.

Chapter 6: ICT Integration In and Beyond the School

This chapter focuses on how schools (K-12) are integrating ICTs in the classroom, including the different types of pedagogy being used in the different countries of Asia with a final section on out-of-school applications of ICTs.

Chapter 7: Instructional Design, Learner Support, and Assessment in E-Learning

This chapter focuses on the design of e-learning with sections on instructional design, mobile learning, blended learning, learner support, and e-assessment.

Chapter 8: Leadership for Educational Change and Innovation

This chapter focuses on leadership in Asian distance and blended learning with sections on strategic planning, leadership styles, leadership and Asian culture, strategies for leadership in change management, and leadership recruitment and development. Although the examples are all from Asia, this should be mandatory reading for senior administrators in universities and colleges everywhere.

Chapter 9: Quality Assurance and Accreditation

After a brief discussion of quality assurance, there are sections on QA in schooling, technical and vocational education and training, and higher education, followed by an analysis of QA in Asian

open and distance learning (ODL), including the different national strategies for QA. There is then a more detailed discussion of administering QA in ODL institutions, including a short section on QA in e-learning. The chapter ends with discussions of international recognition and accreditation and transnational QA.

Chapter 10: Staff Training and Development

This chapter starts by linking the need for staff development to change management, describes the general lack of training and staff development in Asia for distance and blended learning activities, and provides a model and different strategies or approaches to staff development and training, including a comprehensive list of online training resources.

Chapter 11: Research, Publication, and Translating Research into Practice

This chapter is basically a plea for more and better research in distance and blended learning by Asian researchers, particularly focusing on the Asian context. It includes a comprehensive agenda for research, some useful tips about how to get published, and analysis of why Asian researchers tend to be under-represented in publications in this area.

Chapter 12: Conclusions

This is a very short, four-page chapter (probably due to exhaustion by the authors!), which nevertheless provides some very useful lessons and conclusions drawn from the book as a whole.

There is also an extensive bibliography of publications, most of which are by Asian authors.

Evaluation of the Book

I have provided this detailed description of the contents to convey the breadth and scope of this publication. It is not only comprehensive in the countries it covers, but also in the key topics it discusses. It is embedded with examples from different countries, and the analysis and conclusions are convincing.

There are times when it reads like a list of activities, but I would rather the discussion was drawn from multiple examples than isolated cases, and the authors do this well.

What I took particularly from the book is the tremendous energy and drive in Asia towards distance and blended learning. Yes, mistakes are being made, and these are well identified by the authors, but overall one gets the feeling of a huge juggernaut of innovation and change sweeping through many Asian educational institutions. While there are many laggards, countries such as South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, India, and China are making rapid progress in distance education and e-learning. In particular, there seems to be more appetite for fundamental changes, such as the cyber-universities, in some Asian countries than in North America or Europe.

Underlying the book are both differences in ethnic cultures, which is well discussed in the book, and the academic culture, which is less well discussed. It is therefore not always easy to identify those problems that are generic to educational institutions and those that are specific to particular countries or cultures or even to Asia.

Nevertheless, there are many lessons in this book not only for Asian institutions, but also for those in North America, Europe, and Australasia. The importance of training and staff development if e-learning is to be successful, the benefit of national strategies for e-readiness, of which e-learning is a part, the need to focus on the design of learning environments as well as the technology, the value of visionary and professional leadership, and the critical role that research in e-learning can and should play in adapting technology-based teaching to local environments and cultures are all clearly set out in this book and are relevant everywhere, not just in Asia.

Although the particular ODL and e-learning initiatives in Asia will gradually fade from memory, the lessons learned from these experiences and described in this book will last much longer. This is a book that I will refer to constantly. Congratulations, Colin and Insung!

¹ Originally published at E-learning and Distance Education Resources:
<http://www.tonybates.ca/2009/10/05/book-review-distance-and-blended-learning-in-asia/>

