Emerging Strategies for Supporting Student Learning: A Practical Guide for Librarians and Educators

Allan, Barbara
ALA American Library Association, 2016

Book Review

Tags: librarianship | student learning | student learning goals | student learning outcomes

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If you are a librarian or educator engaged in student learning, and are satisfied with the sameness and predictability of current methodologies, read no further. However, if you have need of developing strategies that are up-to-date, relevant, and promote shared perspectives, read on.

Emerging Strategies for Supporting Student Learning equips the reader with an arsenal of educational approaches, geared for higher education. They are field-tested, validated by case studies, and include both North American and European perspectives.

Like many other researchers focusing on emerging trends in education, Allen echoes the common refrain that today's rapidly changing society necessitates "new approaches to support student learning" (1). Where this volume finds its niche and wields special power, is its ability to connect across disciplines – amongst librarians, information workers, and classroom instructors. It can also be utilized with students from undergraduate to doctoral level, and in varied settings.

Among the trends included in this text are: student digital literacies, learning and teaching activities, designing face-to-face, blended and online courses, assessment, and issues of lifelong professional development. The chapters are divided into sections that include a concise introduction, subject content, summary, and references.

Allen brings to her research an acute awareness of the challenges faced in higher education,

having worked for several years in varied educational settings in the United Kingdom. She might even be faulted for showing too much concern when covering certain settings in minute detail. For example, she reminds us that because educators have so little choice about room allocation, "it is worth visiting it beforehand to check the facilities….This double checking could help you avoid being in an embarrassing situation" (126). This relentless attention to detail can also be viewed as her way of ensuring that such strategies are successfully executed.

Throughout the text, we are encouraged to ask critical questions that will help inform the decisions we make about education strategies. When examining formative and summative assessment, the author offers a multitude of questions that might be asked beforehand, including: Why am I assessing? What type of assessment is better served? And where is the best place to do the assessment? (91-92).

The strategies Allen offers are never dogmatically presented. They are, rather, offered in a smorgasbord manner. They are easily constructed and user-friendly. She encourages the use of ice-breakers, informational graphs, and e-posters at academic gatherings and as a way of allowing material "to be presented in a colorful and imaginative way" (87).

Pedagogic models like flipped classrooms are viewed as a way of maximizing student engagement and which runs counter to conventional approaches to teaching and learning.

Traditionally face-to-face classroom time is spent by a tutor explaining or presenting new ideas, and this may be followed by some activities. In a flipped classroom, students explore the material outside the classroom and then spend time with the tutor clarifying and developing deeper knowledge through discussion and activities. (116)

Keeping up-to-date with professional skills is a high priority for this author. She suggests several digital resources across the spectrum to help make that happen, including the American Library Association (ALA), Flickr Creative Commons, MERLOT, and the National Digital Learning Resource (NDLR) – a "collaborative educational community in Ireland…. interested in developing and sharing digital teaching resources and promoting new teaching and learning culture" (110).

The emerging strategies included in this book bear testimony that education is both evolving by the day and in need of constant need of revision. This book helps us move a little toward embracing good educational practice and relevancy.

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