

Book review

Brabazon, T. (2007). *The University of Google: Education in the [post] information age*. Aldershot: Ashgate. (ISBN 075467097X)

Reviewed by Phillipa Sturgess, Central Queensland University, p.sturgess@cqu.edu.au

Studies in LEID is an international journal of scholarship and research that supports emerging scholars and the development of evidence-based practice in education. ISSN 1832-2050
© Copyright of articles is retained by authors. As an open access journal, articles are free to use, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings.

Every technological application, hardware invention or software innovation has its marketers and public relations consultants employed to sell its value. There are few such celebrations for the small victories in reading, writing and thinking.
(Brabazon, 2007, p. 215)

This describes the author's self imposed task in *The University of Google* to become the voice for the small victories of teaching and learning in an environment increasingly governed by economic rationalism and the demands of mass education.

As the title suggests, a focus of this book is the effect of online technologies in university learning and the ways they are inextricably bound to broader changes in society. The education industry touts online learning as a cost effective and desirable way to make learning opportunities available to the increasing numbers of Generation Y students who want to fit a university education into their already busy lives. In this world, Brabazon is a heretic who suggests not only that online learning is not the solution but also that it is actually part of the problem.

She suggests that easy access to vast amounts of information courtesy of search engines such as Google denies students the opportunity to develop a thoughtful capacity to seek and assess information from both wider and deeper sources. Hot items in online learning such as e-lectures are also examined and found wanting. The stated goal of this book is “to transform a fetish for information into a desire for argument, debate and knowledge” (p. 12).

But Professor Brabazon's interest is not restricted to the impact of the Internet on the Net Generation. She examines a higher education within a broader range of modern trends and delineates a web of connections that places university life in the millennial world. Conflicts between managerialism in university governance and the academic principles of teaching and research, expectations of students who are increasingly treated as 'customers', and shifting societal attitudes to the value and purpose of education are placed under the critical lens.

Professor Brabazon speaks from her experience in both Australia and the United Kingdom as a media studies lecturer. She draws on a rich reserve of stories from and about her students, as well as reports and commentaries from a broad range of academic and cultural sources. She also speaks passionately and unashamedly from her own experience and belief in the importance of teachers and teaching. The impact on academic workloads, the changing relationship between students and their teachers, and the growing dissatisfaction of many academics are all discussed.

Her analysis of the wider impacts of these trends in higher education will resonate with many university teachers who feel dissatisfied and disenfranchised by current institutional policy. This book will probably be less popular with those decision

makers who are promoting these policy directions, although this is the audience that could perhaps most benefit from considering the broader impacts of these trends on knowledge and society.

Where this book does disappoint a little is in its inability not only to describe and analyse the problems besetting teachers (a task previously undertaken by the author in *Digital hemlock*, 2002) but also to offer solutions for academics facing these problems. Brabazon exhorts us that “this is not the time for teachers and scholars to be complacent, quiet, complicit or dull” (p. 9). With the exception of a few proposed teaching strategies, this book raises many more problems than solutions. This failure is disappointing but perhaps inevitable given the endemic nature of the problems discussed.

References

Brabazon, T. (2002). *Digital hemlock: Internet education and the poisoning of teaching*. Sydney: UNSW Press.