Editorial: What's in my bookcase

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Six years ago I moved house. I moved from a large house with four bedrooms and a large study, to a much smaller but charming cottage where my study measures just two metres by two metres. I sit at my desk and can touch all four walls! A consequence of the move was that I had to reduce the number of books in my library. Instead of over 6000 books I now have a few hundred. That was painful because I love books, but it also made me think very carefully about which books I would keep. The books on my bookcase are those that I value the most and I wanted to share those titles with you – together with the reasons why I have chosen them. I won't bother with the books that I have written or edited: it is always sensible to keep copies of those so that you can give any spares to people you want to impress! There are also some biographies of interesting philosophers and scientists – and some novels.

After experimenting with careers as a mathematician, a physicist and an electronic engineer, I settled down to be a computer scientist with a particular interest in artificial intelligence. My first three books are almost the only remnants of that time. The subtitle of Donald Knuth's *Fundamental Algorithms* (1973) is 'A programmer's cookbook' and that says all you need to know! Dahl, Dijkstra, and Hoare (1972) wrote the best book I know on structured programming, a technique that can be applied to the design of learning materials (if you think laterally). And then there is Andrei Ershov's early book on *Programming the BESM Computer* (1959) signed by the author when I met him in London in 1976.

I have always had an interest in educational innovation and found two books particularly useful. Lewin (1952) provides a theoretical underpinning for change which formed the basis for my attempts to develop a calculus that would explain innovation in education. Geoffrey Moore's book on *Crossing the chasm* is far more practical and was written for managers who really don't want to be bothered with theory (1999). It goes a long way to explain why learning technology has failed to achieve its full potential.

And so to learning psychology. Cybernetics might not be an obvious place to start but Gordon Pask has interesting things to say in his book on Human Learning and Performance (1975). The writings on Robert Gagné (Richey, 2000) and Lev Vygotsky (Newman and Holzman, 1993) are enlightening. I am always frustrated by the lack of understanding in the West of Vygotsky's work. Everyone refers to his 'zone of proximal development' and then misquotes the reference. I am sure that there is scope for an authoritative article on Vygotsky and his relevance to contemporary education.

For much of my professional life I was a learning technologist and the greater part of my (now diminished) library is devoted to that area. A seminal work (or rather works) is the Romiszowski trilogy (Romiszowski, 1981, 1984 and 1984) known affectionately as DIS, PIS and DAM. (You have to say it in English for the full effect!). An earlier book by Susan Markle (1969) is one of my favourites. It was written for people developing frame-based programmed learning (you may have to look that up!) but is still relevant for developers of e-learning. One of my party tricks when I am talking about e-learning is to

refer to the book. This sends the students searching for Susan Markle, only to find that it was published nearly fifty years ago. A possible retirement project is to revise it and bring it up to date for the current technology. Then there are three weighty tomes (Plomp & Ely, 1996; Dills & Romiszowski, 1997; Stolovich & Keeps, 1999), with a total of 2576 pages (if you include the indexes) and contributions from everyone working in the field that you have ever heard of – as well as many that will be unknown to you.

The two final choices (for this editorial at least) relate to my current work as an editor. The Chicago Manual of Style (2010) contains everything you ever wanted to know about formatting a scientific article, and Hames (2007) tells an editor everything he or she needs to know about publishing it! Hames also gives helpful guidance to authors about getting your work published in the scientific literature.

The careful reader will have seen that few of these books have been recently published and many of them were written more than twenty years ago. The fundamentals of learning do not change rapidly and many of the theories that were set out many years ago still hold true. We neglect them at our peril!

That is my book case: what is in yours?

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