

Book review

BITE: Recipes for remarkable research

(Williams, A., Jones, D. & Robertson, J. (eds., 2014). Sense Publishers)

Eddia Solas

Zayed University, UAE

Research plays an integral role in tertiary level teaching and learning. In traditional scholarly disciplines published research adds to the general body of knowledge and enhances the reputation of the educational institution. However, in research focused on teaching and learning the objective is to solve problems and improve professional practices inside the classroom. Either form of research must take place, whether published or unpublished, to prevent stagnation in educational activities. According to Field (2011), educational research is essential for the improvement of education standards; otherwise education runs the risk of being based solely on theory, ideology, convenience and/or prejudice. Many academic institutions require faculty members to be 'research active' as part of the criteria for promotion. This 'publish or perish' syndrome has precipitated some anxiety among teaching faculty who find it difficult to keep up a steady stream of publications; faculty may be retained or promoted (or not) according to the impact factor of journals in which their work is published.

BITE: Recipes for remarkable research focuses on creating outstanding research. The research habits and experiences of an international network of researchers at all career stages have been analyzed and documented for the benefit of those interested in producing quality research. The authors have done an excellent job of representing the varied stages and experiences of researchers and providing practical solutions to issues inhibiting creativity. *BITE* includes research in a wide range of disciplines including physical science, computer science, social science, architecture, and creative arts. This increases the flexibility and relevance of the book and makes it applicable to educators of all disciplines. As an educator and researcher, this is the type of book you should have on your shelf to pull out as the need arises. It is particularly helpful for action-oriented educational research, which tends to be collaborative, participatory and to explore multiple ways to enhance the learning experience (Hine, 2013).

The book is laid out in a cookbook format with recipes for every occasion, which makes it instantly familiar. Each recipe comes with background, ingredients, method, cook's tips, warnings, related recipes, cost and serving instructions. Unless you are scanning what it includes, the book need not be read all at once, like other books on research. A with a cookbook, you look for a recipe depending on your desires. Are you in a particular mood or frame of mind? Have you run out of ideas? Grappling with remaining fresh and relevant? Do you have ingredients/ ideas/ data you are not sure what to do with, yet you need to produce? Is it a special occasion and you need to create an impact? Whatever the exigencies of your research, *BITE* provides the answers.

The recipes in *BITE* cater to diversity in creative and productive styles. Recipes are grouped into different categories such as: *Working Solo*, *Working With Others* and *Working Environments*. There are recipes for creating a stimulating physical environment, nurturing your ideas, taking advantage of chance encounters to formulate research designs, and using technology to your advantage. The authors deal with the whole person and how you can use everything about you – life, work, play – to create truly

remarkable research. It speaks about planned and serendipitous research events and provides helpful advice on how to foster these activities. *BITE* covers the social, physical and technological aspects of carrying out research and this, along with the user friendly and familiar format, distinguishes the book from others with similar objectives.

The book is aimed at doctoral students and faculty members at all stages of the research journey. Not only does it provide recipes to enhance scholarly output, it also offers recipes focusing on factors which can stifle research, such as *Death By Form Filing*, *Creativity Crush* and *How To Make Your Team Hate Each Other And You*. The book is therefore also relevant for policy- and decision-makers who influence the life of researchers. It addresses institutional policies that can aid or harm creativity and research productivity. It also speaks about the repercussions of emphasizing quantity to the detriment of quality publications.

BITE also challenges researchers to use the physical environment in creative ways to facilitate research. It emphasizes that buildings are made for people and that one of the fastest ways to oust creativity is to preserve the building at the expense of creative expression and individual comfort levels. It speaks about being able to create the right scenery, temperature and space arrangement to enhance creativity and productivity.

Also included in the book are recipes for creative collaboration, such as *Share What You Made*, *Research Group As Extended Family*, *Version Control: Managing Collaboration On Academic Documents* and *Creative Spaces For Interdisciplinary Research*. It introduces its readers to helpful software which can facilitate collaborative endeavors, such as Google Docs, Dropbox and mind mapping software. Interestingly, these suggestions can also be used to facilitate instruction; for example, the software mentioned for collaboration among researchers can easily be applied to facilitating collaboration and communication in a classroom setting. Google Docs and Dropbox can be very useful for group work and for moving around large files such as movies. Mind mapping software can be used to create graphic organizers for students as they make sense of content. The different recipes and techniques can also be applied to foster student ingenuity.

In recipe #19, *Digital Scholarship – start here*, author Derek Jones explains how academics can use technology to enhance their research. This recipe can be especially helpful for Gulf academics because of the proliferation of digital media that exists in and around educational institutions of the region. Jones describes how researchers can streamline their search techniques using technology to enhance their personal workflow and create a *personal knowledge footprint* of notes, bibliographies etc., which can be shared with other investigators. He mentions bibliographic managers that facilitate sharing such as Refworks, Mendeley, and Zotero. Blogging, regular social networking and academic social networking using Academia.edu or Researchgate are also recommended for disseminating work and assisting searches. Jones recommends the use of SlideShare, YouTube, Flickr, Prezi and other online resources to share and stimulate brainstorming. These tools even provide the opportunity to garner feedback on scholarly work, such as pedagogical strategies and innovations, from other people interested in the subject area. Once the work is presented in any of these formats, others have the opportunity to add comments, feedback or suggestions – an easy way to gather useful peer review information. As Jones reports, this kind of practice is fast, inexpensive and effective in spreading information.

BITE does not directly relate to pedagogical techniques, but nonetheless has the potential to be an instrumental handbook in the production of exceptional educational research. For those interested in the scholarship of teaching and learning it provides valuable advice on how educators can create diversity in teaching practice and the learning environment to encourage deep understanding. It is almost impossible to read *BITE*, being inundated with myriad ideas, and not be stimulated to further

thought and creativity to initiate particular projects in one's classroom. The book opens up your mind to transferable creative ideas from other disciplines you may not have thought or had prior experience of. Educators from the physical sciences may find themselves being stimulated by research ideas from the creative arts and architects, because the book underscores the diversity among people and hence the student population and learners they come in contact with.

One example which highlights the potential of creativity through diversity is recipe #32, *Serendipity on the Back of a Napkin*. This recipe encourages the inspiration of ideas by fortuitous encounters. The author, Andrew MacVean, offers suggestions on how to use 'heavy traffic' spaces like diners to facilitate chance meetings away from the pressures to produce. MacVean proposes that these spaces be used to encourage faculty to eat away from their desks and interact with each other informally, bringing together diverse thinking and skill sets. In the Gulf region this could mean diversity in cultures and prior experiences as well, which provide fodder for novel, spontaneous and creative ideas. He advocates that a good supply of napkins be ever present to record inspirations. He suggests banning technology from these spaces to prevent persons from being 'wired in' and not in present contact. Many creative ideas have resulted from interdisciplinary collaborations; a pedagogical technique used in the teaching and learning of language, for instance, may easily find itself useful in a science classroom, especially in a context where subject content is primarily taught in English, a foreign language. When colleagues from different areas discuss their work, the products can be rewardingly synergistic.

BITE: *Recipes for remarkable research* is a must-have for educators who have found themselves trying to initiate research in unfamiliar areas, such as the scholarship of teaching and learning. It is inspiring for academics who do not have the infrastructure in place for the kind of research that they are accustomed to, or those at the start of their research career. With the thrust of tertiary institutions of the region to take their place on the research stage the book provides hope, techniques and guidelines to stimulate ideas, foster research, collaborate and get published – useful tools for academics in higher education.

References

- Field, K. (2011, June 14). The importance of research for education's future. *Express & Star*.
<http://www.expressandstar.com/education/2011/06/14/the-importance-of-research-for-educations-future/>
- Hine, G. S. (2013). The importance of action research in teacher education programs. *Proceedings of the 22nd Annual Teaching Learning Forum*. Perth: Murdoch University.
http://ctl.curtin.edu.au/professional_development/conferences/tlf/tlf2013/refereed/hine.html