Digitization in the intersection between sociology, educational policy and deep learning

Bård Ketil Engen (ed.)

Digitalisering, kompetanse og læring

ISBN/EAN: 9788205538313

Gyldendal Akademisk

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For over two decades, researchers in educational research and related research fields have been publishing books in Norwegian on the digital divide, learning and competence in the Norwegian language, mainly for teacher students, teachers, and school leaders.

These books can be divided into two categories. A few books have been written by only one author (for instance Digital kompetanse by Erstad from 2005 and 2010 (2nd edition), and Digitale skiller by Ivar Frønes from 2002). In the other category, more than two dozen books are edited volumes with contributions from a wide range of different researchers with a common interest in learning, school and ICT. This edited volume, Digitalisering, kompetanse og læring, belongs in this latter category, consisting of five chapters by six different authors and an introduction written by the editor Bård Ketil Engen.

Readers who are hoping for a glimpse of how technology is used in the classroom will be disappointed. Except for chapter two on deep learning and critical thinking (‘Dybdelæring og kritisk tenkning i en digital tid’), all the other chapters discuss concepts such as lifelong learning (chapter 3), social and cultural aspects of digital technology (chapter 4), robots (chapter 5) and programming (chapter 6) without any empirical data. However, these authors present a macro-perspective on several important topics to consider and reflect
upon in educational policy on digital technology. This macro-perspective is interesting in relation to educational policy, but does not address learning as a process. Thus, there is a tension here between learning and competence that is seldom addressed. However, each chapter is valuable and interesting for students working on one of these specific topics in their bachelor or master thesis in pedagogy or sociology.

A recurring theme throughout the book is deep learning (dybelæring). The empirically driven chapter 2 relates the term to critical thinking while drawing on references from the Ludvigsen Committee. From the sociological macro-perspective (in chapter 3), the point of departure for the discussion is also the Ludvigsen Committee, but Frønes limits the pedagogical discussion to how deep learning is achieved in the classroom: “Debatten om dybelæring dreier seg i pedagogisk sammenheng om hvordan man oppnår dette i klasserommet” [“In pedagogical terms the debate on deep learning centers on how one achieves this in the classroom”] (page 54). He argues that the critical question for deep learning is how diverse contexts across lifelong learning can contribute to deep learning: “[…] hvordan disse kan utvikles, og hvordan utdanning kan bidra til livslang læring” [“(…) how these can be developed, and how education can contribute towards lifelong learning”] (p. 54). I do think a number of scholars in pedagogy and educational research will agree to the importance of this perspective.

I started out this review by mentioning two books (Erstad and Frønes) written nearly 20 years ago, one written within the field of pedagogy and the other in the field of sociology. This edited volume, Digitalisering, kompetanse og læring, has the potential to discuss the intersection of these diverse fields and their perspectives on deep learning, digitization, knowledge and competence. Unfortunately, it never manages to contextualize the tension with the lifelong perspective. This is an oversight, and I was hoping for an introduction or perhaps a final chapter that could pinpoint more of these tensions between the macro and the micro-perspectives. A number of researchers in pedagogy have started to look beyond the classroom. At the same time, there are many sociologists who are looking into the buzzing, digital classroom. I hope the dialogue on deep learning across contexts will be elaborated beyond the arguments found in this book. However, for stakeholders in educational policy and for students in pedagogy and sociology, this edited volume may offer inspiring perspectives in the ongoing dialogue on young people, digitization and competence.