



Book Review of Karl Christian Alvestad, Kari H. Nordberg and Hege Roll-Hansen (Eds., 2023). *New perspectives on educational resources: Learning materials beyond the traditional classroom*. Routledge.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2025.8.2.14>

Introduction

While education certainly involves mere knowledge transmission, it is increasingly recognized as a dynamic process where creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking are paramount to the learning experience (Almazroa & Alotaibi, 2023). As conventional classroom materials often fall short of meeting contemporary pedagogical demands, scholarly attention is increasingly turning towards a richer array of educational resources beyond the confines of traditional textbooks and standardized curricula (Williamson, 2013). Consequently, education systems face an imperative to innovate and adapt, particularly in response to the complex global challenges that define our current era (Fan, 2025).

Responding directly to this imperative for educational evolution, their edited volume, *New Perspectives on Educational Resources: Learning Materials Beyond the Traditional Classroom*, Karl Christian Alvestad, Kari H. Nordberg, and Hege Roll-Hansen investigate how diverse learning materials (both digital and physical) can foster crucial twenty-first-century skills (Alvestad et al., 2023). The editors argue that these skills are not only vital for academic success but also instrumental in guiding students towards a future centered on well-being (OECD, 2019). Rooted in Scandinavian educational contexts, the work provides empirically grounded perspectives on innovative resource engagement by both educators and students. Moreover, by integrating insights from language studies, literature, history, and social studies, the book advances a compelling case for an expanded conception of what constitutes a valuable learning tool.

Central to this volume is its challenge to the prevailing notion that educational resources must be explicitly designed for teaching. Instead, the contributors argue that valuable learning materials frequently emerge in unexpected contexts, from historically significant objects and interactive digital platforms to the surrounding natural environment.

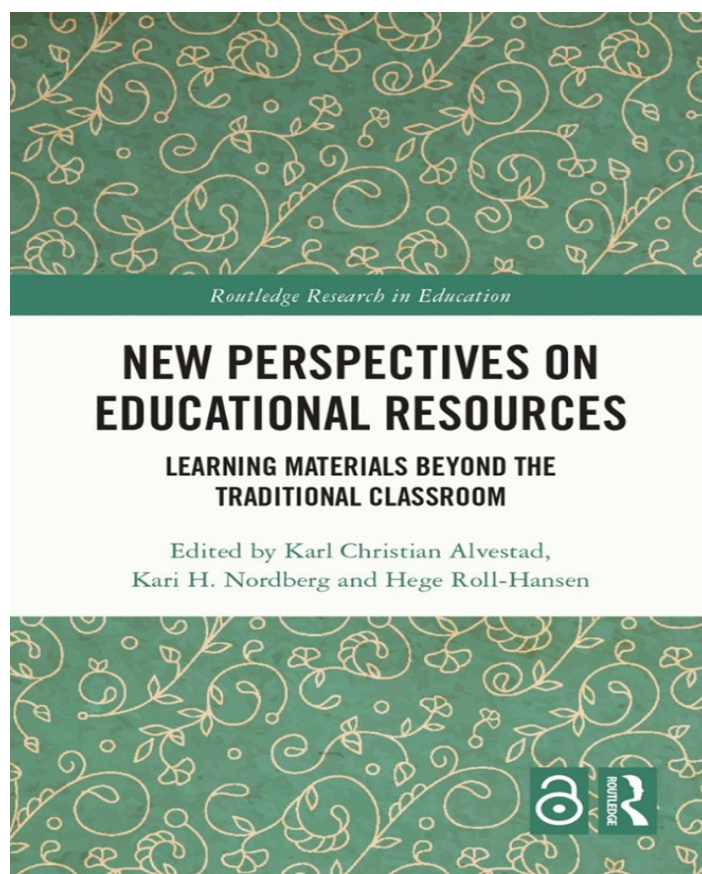


Figure 1. Book cover of Alvestad et al. 2023.

Such an interdisciplinary engagement with resources, the book posits, not only amplifies student involvement but also cultivates a more profound and reflective learning experience. At its core, the work champions an educational philosophy that nurtures the 'four Cs' (creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication) by capitalizing on the richness of varied learning materials. Consequently, the volume advocates for a pedagogical shift away from rigid instructional models and towards more dynamic,

context-responsive resources that equip students for an interconnected world.

Crucially, the discussion transcends mere theory by offering concrete examples of these principles in action within Scandinavian classrooms. This practical grounding solidifies the work's status as a vital contribution to contemporary discourses in curriculum development, didactics, and educational technology. Through its synthesis of perspectives from researchers and practitioners, the volume serves as both a rigorous academic critique and an actionable guide for those seeking to reimagine education. Ultimately, the book prompts a profound reconsideration of learning's foundational elements, and underscores how our engagement with diverse materials (whether within or beyond the classroom) critically shapes not only our knowledge but also our identities as learners.

Overview

Imagine entering a classroom, a museum, or even strolling down a street, and suddenly perceiving that all surrounding elements possess inherent pedagogical potential. This very perspective is foundational to the volume under review, which explores in depth how learning materials (ranging from traditional artifacts to digital tools) are molded by historical, cultural, and technological forces. The era of education solely reliant on textbooks and blackboards is decidedly over. Indeed, as educational approaches increasingly embrace multisensory and multimodal experiences, learning environments must correspondingly adapt to reflect the complexity of real-world knowledge production (Latino & Tafuri, 2025). Learning, therefore, is a ubiquitous process, often occurring in unacknowledged ways. Yet, as the book rightly emphasizes, the mere availability of diverse materials does not guarantee meaningful learning; intentional pedagogical framing remains indispensable for guiding students to interpret and engage with these resources effectively (Chisunum & Nwadiokwu, 2024).

Organized into three distinct sections—Places, Activities and Artifacts, and New Media—the book systematically unpacks the evolving role of educational resources (Figure 2). It advocates an interdisciplinary methodology, synthesizing insights from pedagogy, history, sociology, and technology studies. This multifaceted lens proves vital for addressing contemporary educational challenges, such as the mediation of knowledge by digital tools and the influence of cultural artifacts on identity development. While the volume commendably broadens appreciation for contextually embedded learning, its introductory section could have offered a more incisive examination of accessibility issues and socio-economic disparities within educational technology. This critique is particularly pertinent as the ongoing expansion of the digital age has not resulted in equitable access to these innovations for all students. Furthermore, while the book poses compelling questions, it would have benefited from more explicitly delineating the specific contribution of each cited discipline to its overall analytical framework.

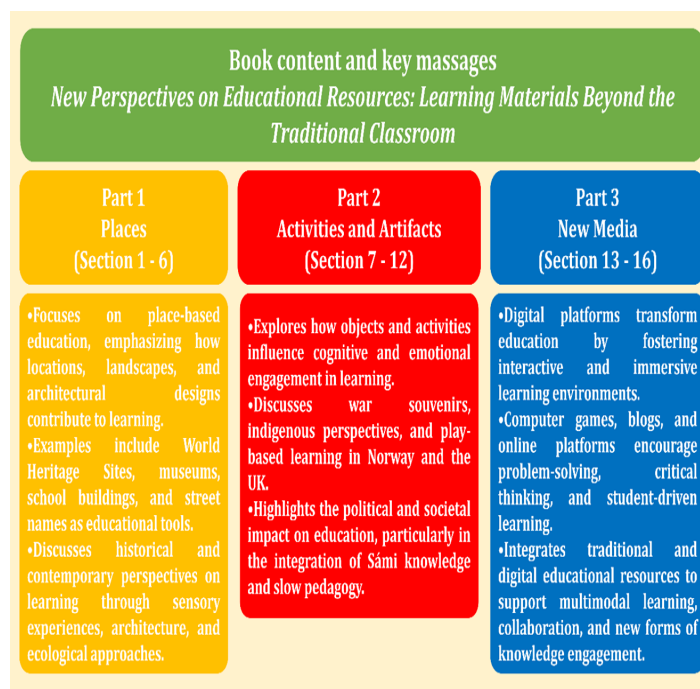


Figure 2. The book's contents and key messages.

A compelling case study in the book's initial chapter immerses readers in Norway's Rjukan–Notodden industrial heritage sites, where history becomes a lived experience. Through 'The Cultural Schoolbag' (TCS) initiative, students undertake period-specific activities, where performative learning makes knowledge acquisition an embodied experience, not just a cognitive one. This experiential approach aligns with constructivist theories emphasizing active engagement (Lebert & Vilarroya, 2024). Yet, the chapter seemingly overlooks pressing issues. Does its potential romanticization of the past, for instance, obscure industrial labor's harsh realities and related inequalities? Do highly structured re-enactments unduly limit students' critical historical engagement, risking mere performance? Critical pedagogy scholars (Zembylas, 2011) caution against 'pedagogical nostalgia' where sanitized re-enactments can mask structural injustices. Finally, the analysis would have benefited from exploring the model's adaptability to less resourced settings, e.g., how schools in underfunded or postcolonial contexts might replicate such immersive learning.

Transitioning from historical sites, the book next considers museums as unconventional learning spaces. For instance, the second chapter positions these institutions not merely as repositories of knowledge, but as potent catalysts for curiosity. According to the authors, museums cultivate this curiosity through rich sensory engagement and by encouraging counterfactual reasoning—those "what if" scenarios that encourage thinking beyond the immediately visible. This portrayal, however, raises a compelling dilemma: Can museums genuinely foster open-ended curiosity while operating within structured educational frameworks? While the chapter rightly acknowledges museums' participatory potential, it should have more critically examined inherent power dynamics, particularly how socio-economic status influences engagement, or how institutional authority shapes "valuable" knowledge. Furthermore, the analysis

would have gained depth from a comparative discussion of diverse museum archetypes, such as science centers versus history museums.

The book's exploration of learning environments extends from museums to architecture of educational institutions, highlighting that education is as much about its settings as its content. The third chapter examines two Scandinavian schools from the 1920s, designed to embody the ideals of *Bildung* (holistic intellectual and moral development). For instance, ELG in Norway, with its neoclassical "miniature Acropolis," aimed to symbolize civic virtue and democratic accessibility, whereas SHL in Sweden prioritized spiritual and humanistic cultivation. Yet, the chapter reveals that despite such ambitious architectural philosophies, both institutions encountered significant practical hurdles. This prompts profound questions explored by the chapter: Can architecture genuinely mold intellectual growth, or is it primarily as a performative symbol rather than a truly functional learning environment? Furthermore, how do national identity and ideology become embedded within the physical fabric of educational spaces? Perhaps a deeper engagement with spatial theory or phenomenology of space would have further illuminated these complex relationships.

The book then broadens its scope to examine how history and culture are inscribed within quotidian elements of the environment. The fourth chapter exemplifies this by examining street names, revealing them as potent, historical markers, presented as 'monuments in disguise' that embed cultural and political narratives into daily life. This concept is linked to Norway's LK20 curriculum, promoting local historical engagement. Nevertheless, the chapter's analysis insufficiently explores the inherently contested nature of street naming. As history is fluid—with names often altered by political realignments, social movements, and decolonization processes—a more thorough exploration was warranted. The discussion should have more robustly analyzed how street names function not merely as passive commemorations but as active arenas for contesting historical narratives. Perspectives from memory studies or critical geography, for instance, would have added further analytical depth.

Subsequently, the volume shifts to explore more personal and performative modes of educational engagement, a timely exploration given the constraints often felt in conventional learning environments. Among these, Iben Brinch's work, detailed in the fifth chapter, is particularly notable. It invites a departure from conventional confines, both physical and intellectual. She posits that writing transcends its function as a mere conduit for ideas to become a mode of thinking itself—a process integral to developing academic identity in novice scholars. This is vividly illustrated by her study of PhD students during the pandemic who, through reflective walking, photography, and writing about their surroundings, wove personal experience into scholarly discourse. Such exercises demonstrably fostered a sense of belonging while challenging traditional academic writing's perceived detachment and impersonality. This methodology resonates with autoethnographic approaches that validate lived experience as a legitimate source of academic inquiry (Le Roux, 2017). Brinch, however, commendably acknowledges

inherent limitations, and raises critical questions: Can such deeply personal reflections uphold academic rigor? Moreover, does place-based writing inadvertently privilege individuals with access to inspiring environments, potentially marginalizing those in less conducive settings? These interrogations underscore a crucial tension between accessibility and intellectual freedom, a tension the book revisits.

Building on themes of place and accessibility, the book next explores learning's ecological dimension (Chapter 6). Inger Birkeland champions interdependence against the climate crisis, critiquing anthropocentrism and advocating a place-conscious pedagogy that acknowledges human-environment reciprocity to cultivate hope over student despair from current climate education. While vital, this approach is not without challenges. The chapter, for instance, could have more deeply examined formal education's structural impediments to such relational methodologies (Smith, 2013). Persistent questions remain regarding curricular integration and education's role against systemic ecological decline. Nonetheless, Birkeland's vision aligns with 'responsible knowing' (e.g., Lorraine Code and Isabel Stengers), defining learning as a co-evolutionary human-environment process.

The book then shifts from the natural environment to the personal realm of memory and materiality. Chapter 7 by Kerstin Bornholdt explores how historical objects can serve as learning tools. Her case study—a WWII soldier's Eiffel Tower, once a souvenir—reveals its transformation into a complex historical artifact. By engaging with such objects, students can bridge personal narratives with broader historical events, fostering empathy and critical thinking. Rooted in museum pedagogy, this method enables experiential rather than passive historical study. Yet, emotional connections to artifacts demand critical interrogation to mitigate nostalgia or bias (Zembylas, 2011). Key pedagogical challenges include ensuring personal artifacts enhance (not overshadow) historical analysis, and scaling this intimate methodology to broader curricula. Bornholdt's work thus underscores history's fluid meaning: a war memento reinterpreted as an educational tool.

Indigenous knowledge systems offer a critical lens for rethinking education, a theme the volume explores via Sámi perspectives shaping Norway's teacher education (Chapter 8). With global emphasis on twenty-first-century skills—collaboration, critical thinking, and cultural awareness—Norwegian teacher educators are increasingly turning to such guidance. A key autoethnographic project (USN) documents how engagement with indigenous literature fosters deep reflection and collective learning. Embracing "slow pedagogy," these educators prioritized meaningful engagement over productivity-driven efficiency. Resisting neoliberal pressures that frame education primarily as a competitive enterprise remains the key challenge. Can indigenous perspectives be genuinely integrated into mainstream teacher education, or will they remain largely tokenistic? Real transformation, the study suggests, requires vulnerability and the will to unlearn dominant worldviews—a process both difficult and necessary.

The challenge of understanding how dominant worldviews shape educational practices is compellingly addressed in the book's ensuing analysis of national policy discourses. In Chapter 9, Aye Thida Oo and Anders Davidsen employ Critical Policy Discourse Analysis to compare the framing of play-based learning (PBL) in early years education in Norway and England. Their analysis reveals distinct ideological underpinnings: in Norway, play is predominantly constructed as a child's intrinsic need and right, fostering academic skills via child agency rooted in Froebelian thought. Conversely, the English context, while also viewing PBL as instrumental for academic development, frames it more via adult-led guidance, shaped by neoliberal emphases on academic performance and school readiness. Exploring these discourses' impact on 21st-century skills, the chapter acknowledges benefits in both approaches while stressing the influence of national agendas and societal values on pedagogy. It further illuminates the persistent tension between child-led exploratory play and meeting academic preparedness demands in early childhood education.

These societal and ideological influences on pedagogy, previously discussed, are now cast into sharp historical relief in the next chapter. Merethe Roos, in Chapter 10 discussing a 1950s Norwegian language dispute, offers a historical vignette contextualizing a local newspaper debate within wider national and pedagogical currents. The chapter revisits Eidsvoll (1953), where Norwegian language variants (bokmål vs. nynorsk) in schools ignited controversy over critical thinking and student autonomy. This is exemplified by the conflict surrounding teacher Eivind Vågslid, whose nynorsk advocacy was seen as suppressing student engagement. By linking critics' arguments for linguistic freedom to reform pedagogy and critical thinking, Roos demonstrates current educational concerns' deep historical roots. This chapter compellingly shows educational resources are never neutral but are instead potent sites of ideological contestation regarding culture, identity, and the nature of learning.

The ideological charge inherent in educational resources, a theme underscored in the previous discussion, finds new expression as the volume turns to environmental engagement. Hege Roll-Hansen, in Chapter 11, meticulously details the shifting pedagogical, political, and ideological rationales for Norwegian schoolchildren's involvement in forestation projects from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s. She demonstrates how tree-planting was imbued with evolving societal values, from 'arbor day' movements (driven by deforestation and economic concerns) to post-WWII rebuilding, aided by materials like the *Skog-ABC* textbook. It traces a shift from early ecological awareness to a post-war, economically rationalized forest view, including problematic non-native species introductions. This historical perspective offers a valuable framework for contemporary environmental education, especially amidst the ecological crisis. It insightfully reveals both continuities in ecological concern and critical differences in framing human-nature relationships within teaching.

The volume's focus on diverse educational resources continues with an examination of a familiar, yet evolving, pedagogical tool: songs. In Chapter 12, Ragnhild Elisabeth Lund investigates their reinvention for contemporary

English language learning (ELL) amidst new technologies. Her study offers valuable empirical data from a survey of 110 experienced Norwegian English teachers on their views and practices. Findings indicate a general teacher preference for songs, especially with younger learners, for language practice, vocabulary, and pronunciation, with increasing use of online platforms like YouTube. While cited benefits include motivation, Lund's research reveals that songs' full potential often remains unexploited due to a lack of explicit follow-up activities. The chapter highlights this potential-practice gap. Consequently, Lund suggests that more explicit teacher training on songs' pedagogical affordances is needed to innovatively leverage these familiar resources.

The volume's third part, 'New Media', addresses innovations like digital media. Chapter 13 (Kari H. Nordberg) addresses the challenging topic of teaching about pornography with historical depth and sensitivity. Her chapter on educational resources for this sensitive subject examines Norway's historical approach to sex education and material development dilemmas. The historical comparison Nordberg draws (between 1980s activism and contemporary approaches using guidebooks like *Pornopratt*) is illuminating. It highlights persistent challenges, such as representation (often leading to 'indirect' teaching) and the framing of youth as vulnerable. Nordberg also highlights the delicate balance educators must strike between fostering a non-shaming discourse and encouraging critical engagement with the pornography industry and rights, complicated by youth's online access. This crucial chapter underscores the enduring difficulty of resourcing such instruction amidst societal anxieties and student impact concerns.

Continuing Part III's new media exploration, the subsequent chapter shifts from online content challenges to the pedagogical potential of WWII video games in teacher education for fostering historical consciousness (Chapter 14, Brazier and Sandberg). Their insightful, theoretically robust chapter analyzes diverse game genres (e.g., strategy, FPS, adventure)—dissecting war portrayals, inherent biases, and gamified actions, and how to foster critical engagement. Grounding their analysis in theories of historical consciousness (Rüsen) and gamified action (Galloway), they emphasize engaging game mechanics and narrative structures—not merely content—to develop sophisticated historical understanding. A key contribution is 'teacher pro-action,' transforming gameplay into reflective historical inquiry. These games' varied perspectives offer opportunities to explore historical narratives, empathy, and critical thinking, providing a model for educators to meaningfully integrate games.

Continuing Part III's exploration of new media beyond games, Kari Anne Rustand, in Chapter 15, delves into informal online interactions by analyzing peer interaction roles in blog comment sections. Using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), she scrutinizes comments from Norwegian L1 pre-teacher students on university course blogs. Rustand's findings identify varied positive student roles (e.g., advisor, supporter, knowledge sharer); interactions are generally characterized by benevolence and sharing. However, the study also notes that deep critical engagement or rigorous testing of theoretical concepts is less prominent.

The application of SFL provides a nuanced understanding of these interactional dynamics. Ultimately, Rustand proposes a framework to interpret these roles. She underscores their potential for developing vital communication skills and fostering collaborative learning—crucial 21st-century competencies. Her work offers valuable insights for educators on harnessing online peer dialogue for learning.

Part III's new media exploration concludes with a focus on student-led critical production of texts. Marthe Øidvin Burgess, in Chapter 16, explores 'redesign' as a classroom method to develop critical literacy in Norwegian upper secondary students. Drawing on social semiotics and critical literacy theory (Janks' model), the chapter examines student projects transforming stories into films or creating Instagram posts for Old Norse gods. While these cases demonstrate students' semiotic manipulation, Burgess argues that fully fostering critical literacy, educators must explicitly frame such activities critically. Crucially, she emphasizes the teacher's role guiding students to deconstruct their redesigned texts and analyze ideological implications. This focus on redesign's cyclical nature and the teacher's critical facilitation of meta-reflection offers insights for educators aiming to empower students as critical readers and producers of multimodal texts.

Drawing on approaches such as student-led redesign, this book presents a central provocation. It urges readers to critically re-examine where and how learning occurs. The volume shows education unfolding in often unrecognized ways—through industrial heritage sites, museums, school architecture, myth, film, or street narratives. While offering rich discussion, the book, as noted, occasionally hesitates at deeper critical engagement. Nonetheless, it sparks an essential contemporary conversation: Amidst rapid change, how can learning remain accessible, inclusive, and critically attuned to history and society? Despite varied focal points, the collected chapters share a core conviction: learning transcends mere knowledge transmission, becoming a force shaping identity, fostering relationships, and enabling deep worldly engagement. Through explorations of reflective writing, ecological consciousness, historical artifacts, and indigenous epistemologies, its contributors collectively challenge established notions of learning itself. They powerfully remind us that impactful education features not by definitive answers but by generative questions—inquiries propelling learners beyond familiar horizons into transformative spaces.

Discussion and reflection

The generative questions and the call to explore transformative intellectual spaces, so powerfully evoked by *New Perspectives on Educational Resources*, prompt deeper reflection on education's historically defining foundational assumptions. A primary, often implicit, assumption has been that education is confined to its traditional physical spaces. For centuries, learning has largely been conceived as confined to classrooms, orchestrated by textbooks, structured curricula, and standardized evaluations. The present volume, however, compellingly invites transcending this conventional framework, urging a more expansive

and dynamic conception of learning—one that permeates everyday life beyond formal institutions, transforming the world into a potential classroom. Such a perspective powerfully aligns with contemporary movements in place-based and situated learning, underscoring the deeply contextual nature of knowledge acquisition (Subramaniam, 2020).

Further aligning with contemporary thought on contextual learning, the volume's particular strength lies in its adept fusion of theoretical insights with palpable, lived experiences. The contributors do not simply advocate for pedagogical transformation; they vividly illustrate its potential through tangible scenarios. Whether envisioning a child learning history via digital simulation, a teenager understanding physics through skateboarding, or students engaging in profound discussions on online forums, such examples powerfully argue for a redefinition of educational resources. The book thereby challenges its readers to perceive learning not as a linear, curriculum-dictated process, but as an evolving, interactive journey shaped by context, curiosity, and technology. This emphasis on non-linear, emergent learning pathways resonates strongly with contemporary calls for adaptive, student-centered educational models (Toh, 2016).

The strong resonance of the volume's ideas with calls for adaptive, student-centered learning highlights not just their relevance but their distinct urgency in the current educational climate. In a world profoundly shaped by digital interactions and interdisciplinary modes of thought, the book's exploration of new learning spaces is timely and necessary. Nevertheless, while its conceptual depth is considerable, the volume occasionally prioritizes theoretical exploration over concrete application. Consequently, readers seeking explicit, step-by-step strategies to integrate these innovative ideas into formal educational settings may desire more direct guidance. Although the book excels at stimulating new perspectives and opening intellectual doors, it often entrusts practical implementation to the reader's interpretive efforts. This disjunction between visionary thinking and practical enactment, as Neil Selwyn notes regarding digital optimism, represents a persistent challenge in educational innovation (Selwyn, 2021).

Despite the aforementioned limitation regarding practical guidance, the strengths of this book considerably outweigh this concern. Unlike many works that concentrate exclusively on critiquing traditional education, this volume distinguishes itself by offering constructive alternatives and maintaining an optimistic, though realistic, view of the potential for change. Its narrative, artfully crafted by drawing upon a wide array of disciplines (the user should verify and specify these, e.g., pedagogy, sociology, media studies, etc.), achieves a compelling balance of intellectual rigor and profound human relevance. The book serves as a potent reminder that learning is not restricted to formal settings like classrooms, textbooks, or screens, but is intricately woven into the fabric of everyday existence. This interdisciplinary ethos resonates deeply with the broader shift towards complexity thinking in education, which views learning as a relational and emergent process (Davis & Sumara, 2014). Indeed, the volume exemplifies how interdisciplinary inquiries

yield vital insights into education. These insights, in turn, can inform the design of more integrative and interactive learning experiences, aligning with research championing problem-centered approaches for meaningful integration and constructive alignment (Klaassen, 2018).

Conclusion

Ultimately, *New Perspectives on Educational Resources* stands as a significant and intellectually stimulating contribution to the ongoing evolution of educational discourse. By boldly challenging the established boundaries of traditional learning environments, it extends a compelling invitation to educators, researchers, and policymakers to fundamentally reconsider how and where learning occurs. The volume effectively promotes contextual, interdisciplinary, and student-centered paradigms, articulating a vision of education that prioritizes adaptability, relevance, and the richness of human experience. While its profound theoretical explorations may, as noted, leave certain practical applications less detailed, the book's distinct power lies in its capacity to ignite critical reflection and forge new avenues for pedagogical innovation. It emphatically affirms that meaningful learning is not circumscribed by formal settings but is, instead, intricately interwoven with the complex tapestry of everyday life. Is this volume therefore recommended? Unequivocally. It is offered not as a prescriptive roadmap but as a powerful invitation to rethink, to experiment, and to embrace a more fluid and responsive educational philosophy. Rather than furnishing formulaic solutions, it inspires its audience to explore adaptive, context-driven models of learning, rendering it exceptionally valuable for those prepared to transcend conventional limits and envision new horizons for education.

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