

## Book Review

### **Lea, J. (ed). (2015) *Enhancing Learning and Teaching in Higher Education- Engaging with the dimensions of practice***

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This book presents an ambitious yet largely successful attempt to combine the bi-fold aims of illuminating aspects of university-based learning and teaching, with helping academics to focus on the essential elements of their practice to support their claims for Higher Education Academy Fellowship (an endorsement to demonstrate the professional status of HE practitioners in the UK and elsewhere). One of its strengths is that it forces reflection on practice, providing a framework for interrogating learning and teaching, along with a refreshing insight into selected aspects of scholarship.

As an edited text written by multiple authors, it cleverly avoids being a collection of different voices by adopting a common structure for each chapter, with introductions, activities, opinion pieces and 'Dear lecturer' sections. This effectively provides the glue that binds the book together as a holistic text rather than a disjointed and atomised array of chapters. Indeed, the standardised format is helpful in ameliorating potential changes in style often associated with edited books.

I particularly like the 'activity-based' focus of this book, echoing the positive move across the sector to encourage all students to be active rather than passive in their learning. The activities which punctuate each chapter are well-chosen, stimulating both thought and action in the process of evidence-collection for HEA Fellowship accreditation. They are also grounded in reality and therefore likely to be extremely believable to the academic reader. Examples are given from different universities and contrasting disciplines, yet hinting strongly at the transferability of practice to other subject areas. The way these activities are formatted in each chapter is extremely clear, providing clarity and direction for the reader to focus on the aspects which are most relevant to them.

A refreshing aspect of this book is the strong recognition of the 'messiness' and complexity of teaching in a contemporary HE environment. This takes the book beyond a teaching methodology textbook to a realistic exploration of the current learning environments within most universities. By so doing, it highlights the everyday tensions and conflicting pressures faced by academics as they teach within the constantly changing landscape of HE. Context-setting in this way is an important part of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), a nationally-recognised framework for benchmarking success within HE teaching

and learning support (HE Academy 2015), and the portrayal of this aspect grounds the book in the reality of today's HE world. As a consequence, both novice and experienced academics are likely to be exposed to thought-provoking aspects of pedagogy in the various chapters, helping them to question their changing roles and identities in a university setting.

In terms of the target audience for this book, both individual applicants for HE Academy Fellowship and teaching staff who are on postgraduate certificate courses which confer HE Academy Fellowship are acknowledged. I feel that education developers might also find some of this book's content stimulating for their work, giving them insights into potential debates and discussions through which to guide others in small or large-group sessions. Moreover, experienced learning and teaching staff in a range of HE environments would find it a useful text to help them understand their teaching context.

Although claiming to be a guide for professional recognition to the UKPSF framework, this book acknowledges the individuality of each person's application and therefore does not seek to be a prescriptive blueprint. There does, however, appear to be an implicit assumption that all applications for Fellowship are written rather than verbal, and so adaptations to some institutional schemes might need to be made.

All in all, this book serves as an extremely useful guide to the blending of practice, scholarship and reflection which underpins both the UKPSF and university teaching in general. It illuminates the ever-changing nature of Higher Education and seeks to help academics make sense of their learning and teaching experiences within this context.

## References

HE Academy (2015). *UK Professional Standards Framework*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf> [Accessed: 13.4.17.]