Book Review

A Handbook of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Enhancing Academic Practice. By Heather Fry, Steve Ketteridge and Stephanie Marshall (2003) Kogan Page Ltd. London, U.K. and Sterling, VA. USA.

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Note: the following book review represents a collaboration and dialogue between specialists in different disciplines. Dr. McGee's contributions appear in normal type, and Dr. Cader's in italics.

AM: The editors of this handbook have experience in many fields, but they are all connected with higher education and teacher development in some way. Heather Fry comes from an education and medical background, Steve Ketteridge has teaching experiences in life sciences and civil engineering and Stephanie Marshall was a lecturer in Educational Studies. These varied backgrounds have enabled the editors to include chapters from a wide range of subjects relating to teaching and learning in higher education.

In the user's guide at the front of the book, the editors recognize the fast pace of change in higher education in Britain, in the last decade, as well as the stress and demands on teachers' time. They see this multifaceted and multidisciplinary handbook therefore as a useful reference for those involved in higher education. According to the editors, this second edition includes more recent research and publications, new case studies and a wider range of disciplines, than the first edition in 1999.

The book is organized into three parts. Part 1, *Development of practice*, contains 13 chapters, which explore major facets of teaching and learning from a broad perspective. For example there is a chapter on principles of student assessment, and

another chapter on supporting student learning. This part of the handbook appears to be directed more toward inexperienced teachers in a higher education environment. Part 2, *Development of the academic for teaching and learning*, looks at ways in which teachers in higher education can explore and develop their practice. This section of the handbook contains only 3 chapters, which is much less than the preceding and following parts. Part 2 discusses teaching portfolios, observations of teaching and reflective practice. Finally Part 3, *Working in discipline-specific areas*, looks at some of the major characteristics of teaching, learning and assessment in major discipline areas. The editors see the usefulness of this part of the handbook as providing opportunities for teachers in specific disciplines to explore and benchmark across other disciplines. These chapters range from experimental sciences and engineering to nursing and medicine to the humanities and business.

YC: *This comprehensive book (450 pages) is intended for relatively inexperienced teachers in higher education. I found however, some chapters of interest to more experienced teachers. Also, this second edition has updated the use of learning technologies such as online teaching technologies, which would be useful to academics wanting to maximize the potential of using blackboard, such as myself in teaching at Zayed University.*

AM: For relatively inexperienced teachers in higher education, Part 1 of the handbook is useful in introducing and clarifying broader ideas of organizing teaching and learning as well as pedagogical principles to help in the practice of teaching. For example Chapter 3, Organizing teaching and learning: outcomes-based planning by Vaneeta-marie D'Andrea and Chapter 6, Lecturing for learning by Jennifer Horgan. Both of these are reviewed by Dr. Cader below.

YC: *Chapter 3 recommends two important concepts in modern day teaching: (1) The focus is on “outcomes to be achieved for the student, not content to be imparted” and (2) shifting from the knowledge base of the teacher to the knowledge base of the student. In the former concept, teachers are now more focused on meeting student needs rather than “off-loading” as much content as is possible during the semester. Students in general, value this type of delivery especially in the UAE, where the students are struggling with language issues. In addition, they want to be able to relate what they learn to their own environment. Unfortunately, the students may find that in a global environment, it is sensible to be able to relate their knowledge to the borderless world. In the latter concept, teachers sometimes have difficulty in transferring their knowledge to the student. This should be done by empowering the student to learn independently and to think creatively. It is my experience that*

students learn better when they work on projects rather than learn only from lectures. This has been emphasized in this chapter.

In Chapter 6, Horgan discusses arguments for and against delivering lectures to students. On the one hand, lectures alone are often considered inadequate in terms of knowledge transfer to students. On the other hand, according to the book, they are necessary for providing background information and ideas, basic concepts, and methods required by students before they can learn much on their own and become effective participants in classroom teaching. I do tend to agree with this concept, provided other means of delivering the knowledge is also provided e.g., online support (Blackboard), review of case studies, group projects, etc. The book also mentions that in the traditional lecture, the student often takes a largely passive role and there is little opportunity for active learning, such that the learner can engage with the subject matter being presented. The author also states that research studies on memory and retention of material show that students frequently forget, or never learn, much of the material presented to them during a typical 50-minute traditional lecture. This is certainly true and a good academic will always innovate ways of delivering lectures. I find some of the best teachers innovate by teaching using stories or case studies. The students often pay more attention if the lecturer can talk of her/his personal experience in for example, how she/he increased the products market share by using a creative strategy.

AM: I agree with Dr.Cader that this handbook is very comprehensive and primarily intended for relatively inexperienced teachers in higher education. However, like Dr.Cader, I also found a number of chapters that could appeal to more experienced teachers. These are particularly those on recent developments in teaching, learning and assessment in Part 2. For example Chapter 15 on Reflective practice by Margot Brown, Heather Fry and Stephanie Marshall. The authors point out that as teachers we often fail to reflect on our own practice. We encourage our students to reflect on their learning through self-assessments, journals and critiques but as teachers we should be learning to become active, purposeful reflective practioners. This chapter makes some important points; however, more examples on how to improve practice would be useful. Also the authors seem to become sidetracked into looking at teaching and leaning styles and away from reflective practice.

Chapter 17 on Teaching Portfolios could also be interesting for more experienced teachers as this touches on a more recent, non –traditional tool for assessment. This chapter covers many important and practical aspects of using portfolios, which a teacher would find useful background information. For example, this chapter looks at

typical contents of portfolios, how to build portfolios, non-paper based portfolios and a couple of case studies. This would be a useful starting point to using teaching portfolios, however, for the more experienced teacher, I felt there is not sufficient detailed information on this subject.

YC: *Like Dr. McGee, I found on a personal level to academics, that there were some good ideas and concepts in developing teaching portfolios in Chapter 17. In building a teaching portfolio, providing evidence is most important. The book lists a number of ways this could be done. AV materials e.g., handouts from PowerPoint presentations, student evaluations, examples of student works, video, audio, DVD and photographic materials, educational publications, etc are some of the examples listed. The advantages of online portfolios are also listed. Portfolios are useful with applications for promotions, or to present to prospective employers to demonstrate evidence of one's teaching expertise.*

AM: In the editors' user's guide they claim that this handbook has a number of distinctive features. These are "Interrogating practice", case studies, further readings and the glossary at the end of the book. The glossary of main terms encountered in teaching and learning would be useful for inexperienced teachers and the further readings at the end of each chapter are a useful link for all readers of this handbook. What the editor's call, "Interrogating practice", is dealt with by posing questions to the readers in each chapter. This is done to invite the reader to consider aspects of their own institution, courses, students or practice. These questions can be used as a means of reflection whilst reading. The other aspect of the handbook is the case studies giving examples from real life situations. These seem to be particularly useful as it makes the concepts and ideas in the chapters more applicable to the individual teacher. Thus helping to overcome some of the problems of relating theory to practice.

YC: *As Dr. McGee mentions, the number of case studies drawn from real life situations provide useful knowledge to academics and students who are interested in continual learning. For example in Chapter 6 – Lecturing for learning, Horgan, discusses using an interactive approach in teaching using a case study at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. For example she mentions that lectures are often punctuated with questions every ten minutes. I tend to agree with this, it is good to take an interactive approach, to ask questions, perhaps also to give a small exercise to reinforce the concept being taught. However, in a large class setting, it may be difficult to ask questions. Furthermore, According to the book, case studies are widely used in the business discipline, so is teaching using team work. I would like to*

add that teaching how to do business plans is also one of the most important components of teaching business students. This is implemented in the College of Business Sciences at Zayed University. The authors suggest a team teaching approach to integrate teaching where cross-curricular teaching may be identified: for example, the environment, ethics, globalization, and the knowledge economy. I believe the latter topic is growing in importance in the 21st Century and the discipline of knowledge management is already being taught in many universities across the world. Further, the authors also suggest including a program incorporating an internship, then the mode of assessment may require the student to link theory with practice and to identify the various subjects to his or her experience. At Zayed University, students from the Senior Seminars (Capstone Projects) incorporate their work experience with the theory in their discipline and present a substantial piece of work which also attempts to incorporate as much of their learning experience at the University.

AM: As a language specialist, I focused on Chapter 22, Key aspects of teaching and learning in languages by Carol Gray and John Klapper. Both these authors work at Birmingham University in the modern languages department. This chapter looks at the changing face of modern languages in higher education, including second language acquisition fields and changing approaches to teaching languages, such as the communicative approach. There are 3 case studies from modern languages situations included in this chapter. I found this chapter interesting but again aimed at inexperienced teachers. The chapter was also clearly related to modern language teaching and not the teaching of English in a second/foreign language situation as we have in Zayed University. It was also rather United Kingdom specific; for example the affects the changes in the British school curriculum have had on the ability of incoming students to universities in Britain.

YC: *As a business specialist and a user of technology at Zayed University, Chapter 11- Virtual space, real learning: an introduction to VLE's, by John Pettit and Robin Mason, includes an excellent section on teaching using blackboard/ WebCT. I found this chapter to be most useful in increasing my knowledge of teaching using the Blackboard at Zayed University. The book discusses how the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is used at the Open University (UK). The VLE engages the student more than traditional offline teaching (provided the content of the material is of good quality). The discussion board in Blackboard is excellent. It is my experience that combining face-to-face teaching and using online teaching is one of the best ways of empowering students to acquire knowledge for the moment.*

To sum up, this is a good book and provides a lot of knowledge that is useful to teachers. It is however rather too long, and could have been condensed to possibly no more than 200 pages to attract a target audience who are pressed for time. However, it is best read by selecting the chapters that are of interest to the readers. The chapters on teaching technology, subject disciplines, and teaching portfolios are very useful and well worth reading.

AM: I would recommend this handbook to inexperienced, beginner teachers in higher educational institutions. The book is definitely aimed at this audience and covers a wide range of important issues and subjects. A criticism of the book could be its length, but as a handbook, most readers would not read it from cover to cover but dip into the sections that are relevant. For more experienced teachers it lacks theoretical background, sufficient support and detailed information. As a teacher in the UAE in a second language situation the case studies and examples are not directly relevant, as the book is obviously aimed at teachers of higher education working in Britain. However, Part 1 of the handbook, which deals with key concepts in teaching and learning in higher education, has some important and very relevant information.