

Assessment for Learning in Higher Education
Kay Sambell, Liz McDowell and Catherine Montgomery
Routledge (2013)
Review by Kate D'Arcy

A book entitled 'Assessment' is not one which you might pick up as light bedtime reading. Lecturers, teachers and other professionals involved with the policy and practice of assessment strategies may not want to think about assessment any more than they absolutely have to. Nevertheless, here is a book that can help you do it better. In addition, the authors do an excellent job of making it an engaging read. They suggest that the book is a practical guide to Assessment for Learning (AfL) which is designed to help busy practitioners put AfL into practice, and I would suggest that this is exactly what they do.

This is a book that can be read from start to finish, but it is also one that you can pick up when you need some ideas about designing assessment, summative and formative assessment strategies, peer and self-assessment, or how to give good student feedback. In the eyes of the authors, AfL is a model which is holistic and can facilitate learner-orientated assessment, and they have designed their AfL model on a set of principles that are grounded in research and practice. Each chapter reflects this approach – it is structured carefully, it contains important theoretical elements as well as examples of how you might actually put the ideas into practice. Case studies from different university teachers in various disciplines are offered to give real, working-life examples of how to implement AfL. Each chapter also concludes with discussion points. This book can therefore be used by an individual teacher but also by a whole team.

The authors suggest that 'students should realize that assessment can be an opportunity for learning, rather than just something to be endured and suffered' (p.151). I would suggest that this book is therefore an opportunity for staff and student learning as it supports teachers to support their students to participate in more inspiring assessment processes. Ultimately, implementing some of the ideas and practices within this book should improve and promote student learning. As assessment and feedback are key elements of the NSS, and ones which students still do not rate particularly highly, we cannot deny that this is of central importance to teaching in higher education.

University Teaching in Focus: A Learning-Centred Approach
Lynne Hunt and Denise Chalmers (Eds.)
Routledge (2012)
Review by Tracy-ann Green

This book is aimed and marketed at early-career researchers; however, I am sure even more seasoned academics, as well as relative newbies, would find the book both thought-provoking and challenging. The central tenet of the book is the development of a 'learning-centred approach' to higher education, which is summed up quite nicely in the introduction with: 'There is no one path that works for everyone.' This premise is maintained throughout the book, and rather than providing a set of rules and techniques to follow, the authors

raise questions and issues that you are encouraged to reflect on in terms of your own setting, with helpful case studies from other institutions.

The book is subdivided into four sections that focus on:

- Teaching
- The curriculum
- Students
- Quality and leadership.

The first section on teaching covers the basic ground of learning theories, effective classroom teaching, discipline based teaching, teaching graduate attributes and the effective use of assessment. The section on the curriculum looks at the areas of designing curricular, online and blended learning, research-led curricular, problem based learning and work-integrated learning. The section on students covers the areas of inclusive teaching, international students and indigenous knowers and knowledge. The section on quality and leadership covers quality in university teaching, scholarship, and leadership in teaching.

Although the book is designed as a collective whole, the individual chapters could be read in isolation and in any order. There is clear signposting within the chapters to refer you to where additional information is contained within the book if it is required for a particular chapter. As with any such book that has multiple contributors, the style and pace of the chapters vary quite considerably. Each of the chapters, though, follows a similar layout: an introduction to the core arguments, the main body of the chapter interspersed with 'your thoughts' activities designed to encourage reflection on your own practice, and a conclusion with prompts for further consideration in your own work. This helped to provide a sense of consistency despite the different voices of each chapter. The four sections of the book were not of equal size, however, with the section on teaching and the section on the curriculum taking up two thirds of the book and the sections on students and quality and leadership left with the remaining third, leaving me to wonder if this was a hint by the editors of the relative perceived importance of these areas?

In terms of content, I found the chapter on problem-based learning especially intriguing and I am already working on ways to incorporate more of this element into my own teaching. The chapter on Indigenous knowers and knowledge was highly Australia-centric (the editors are based in Australian universities, leading some of the book to have a distinct Australian flavour), though would certainly be of use to anyone teaching indigenous students. There are good attempts throughout the chapters to link together theory and practice, which in the main are successful. There are a number of illustrative examples of where the theory behind each chapter was put into practice, though some chapters could have done with more of these, for example the first chapter on learning theories was a little dry for my taste and would have benefited from more real world examples. The inclusion of a list of the case studies used in the book was a nice touch though and would enable you to quickly locate yourself to relevant chapters.

Overall, this book acts more like a 'springboard' of ideas and a checklist for reflection on your own practice. You will most likely find yourself with more questions than when you

started reading the book, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. I personally now have a set of tasks and challenges I have set myself and am looking forward to addressing these within my own teaching.

International Students Negotiating Higher Education

Silvia Sovic and Margo Blythman (Eds.)

Routledge (2013)

Review by John Beaumont Kerridge

It would appear that the origins of this text grew from a development of discussions that began just prior to 2006. This shows in the substance of the papers included. The book is divided into four parts – policy, teaching & learning, language and the counterbalance of home students abroad. The audience is intended to be Higher Education professionals, managers and academics both in the UK and internationally. In these respects, the book is well placed. The offerings of each of the contributing papers are well thought out and robust. There is a significant variety of research methods, as well as a wide range of issues which are addressed. It must be remembered also, however, discussing such a topic as international students and their experiences is going to be difficult when the debate of the basic concept, ‘...Is a student a customer?’ in UK Higher Education has not been concluded.

Key issues are considered from a variety of perspectives. For example, the effect of culture shock for international students upon arrival at a Higher Education institution is considered from the viewpoint of their loss of their home country citizenship along with the rights and protections this affords. The regulatory frameworks of immigration can negate the feeling of freedom in terms of intellectual pursuit, a condition unlikely to affect a UK home student. This brings into contrast the ethical issues of care at a very subtle level which are the responsibility of all service agencies within a Higher Education institution. UK university management is questioned, raising the issue that the concept of internationalisation is not clearly defined and as such developed policies do not take account of the differences that will arise at a level of the student experience. This is both from the management of an institution as well as curriculum engagement.

The papers providing the investigations into the teaching & learning aspects bring into focus even more the cultural differences of international students with both their peers and tutors. Examples are provided where, at a grassroots level, informal segregation is permitted to occur within group work i.e. students being allowed to self-select group membership. On one level this disadvantages international students since they do not mix with other UK-based students, and also deprives them of one major objective of studying in the UK, that is to study with other UK students. The concept of Cosmopolitan learning is appropriately raised in this text and well discussed. It is however an evolving topic, so will no doubt feature in future investigations.

The issue of ‘Western-style education’ is questioned in terms of the student perspective when comparing teaching and learning approaches. Whilst this issue is not new, investigations provide a helpful understanding of the effect upon international students. For example, students feeling uncomfortable when asking questions of tutors, having no set