



Resource Review

Name of reviewer:	Helen Burbidge
Job title and department:	Senior Lecturer and Module Leader BSc Fashion Technology, HND Clothing with Design and Academic Practice Officer for Art & Design
Institution:	De Montfort University

Name of reviewed item:	Enhancing Curricula: using research and enquiry to inform student learning in the disciplines
Author(s) / Editor(s):	Editor: Nicholas Houghton
Publisher / distributor details (see note below):	University of the Arts London 2008, The Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design (cltad), 2-6 Catton Street, London, WC1R4AA
Publication / release date:	2008
ISBN number (if applicable):	978-0-9560382-0-3
Technical details (if software – see note below):	CD ISBN: 978-0-9560382-1-0
Price:	£25.00 + p&p

Review:

At first this appears a rather weighty text, but on further inspection it is pleasing to see fifty-two papers (bite size pieces) that aim to provide an insight into teaching and learning methods to enhance the student learning experience. The book consists of nine sections that house the many papers. Further detail is given as an introduction or abstract at the beginning of each paper, so if the content is not clear from the title a reasonable understanding can be gained simplifying the location of the area of interest.

There is a diverse range of examples resulting in a few case studies offering little relevance to your own subject area. The majority of case studies offer many experiences that relate to your own subject closely and many that are transferable. A CD accompanies the book and presents images in a much better (colourful) format than the black and white print that is a much poorer representation within the text.

This is a very good time to release such a wealth of case studies. Many HE institutions are investing in the enrichment of the curriculum to appeal to the wider student body. Within my institution at De Montfort University many lecturers are creating their own Teaching and Learning (T&L) groups within their own faculty to share and drive forward good practice, so this compilation of papers is a welcome edition. I look forward to sharing this with my Textiles group and hope to trial a few of the practices in my teaching this year.

As the content is so diverse I have selected a few examples to discuss which give a flavour of how this resource can be used within HE.

The most valuable exercise this edition encourages us as educators to do is to reflect on our expectations of the students' capacity to learn. As we specialise in our subject area the terminology and mastery of the skills needed to create and develop are second nature to us. I often force myself to take a step back to ensure my expectations are not too high. Ana Maria Pacheco in her paper 'Transformations' discusses transferable skills as the effective use of language and teaching of technique and the danger of transferring experiences, where students should be allowed to build their own (p.16). This should make us consider the language we use and how we should build in a range of methods to deliver technique to cater for the variety of learning styles. The concern voiced by many colleagues is how to cope with meeting the individual educational need for each student when the class numbers are rising. Lauren Winsor's enquiry 'Researching teaching practice to support student learning' focused on the increase in student numbers and investigated active learning and teamwork as new ways to hold a crit (p.52). While this was brief and I would have liked a more detailed account, it gives food for thought that we should be trialling methods to see which ones work. Moving on to Laura Cressin in her paper '1,000 languages of design: looking to Reggio Emilia as a guide for teaching Graphic Design in higher education', I wholeheartedly agree with her view that it is our role as a teacher to read and research good practice to find ways and means of getting to know your students without the negativity often felt with the increase in class sizes (p.439). Although, she has built time into her sessions to allow bonding for an enriched learning experience with all students, it is hard to envisage when delivering a lecture to a class of over 90 students in a session that has had its hours cut. A comment that was made to me recently was 'I bet you know every students name', to which I agreed. This colleague recoiled with an expression of 'shock horror' and commented that with his 'class sizes and the numerous repeats this was impossible.' This leads to the question where do we go from here? I would like to see more research in this area which is not covered in this book, but I also feel that some testing of methods (interactive voting games, Winsor's small group crits) need to take place in order to progress. The fear in losing precious time by trialling a method that may not work is often the reason for my colleagues resisting new methods and this is an area we will strive to conquer through our T&L group.

Another topic of debate is the part assessment takes in the learning process and having read these papers I will now reflect on how much emphasis I attach to the final outcome and ensure I weight the assessment to fully appreciate the learning process. Much of this may be the fault of the module template that states the learning outcomes. Tara Winters in her paper 'Assessing for learning in art and design' states that 'the learning-outcome based approach to curriculum design questions the practice of relying too much on material outcomes as adequate evidence of learning' (p.483). This should be a definite read as there are tips for writing good learning outcomes. Perhaps, by assessing the development process the student will come to value their own progress at an earlier stage and avoid the rush to the finish line! Maybe that would engage the student in the workroom experience and we may see the illusive few a little more often!

One of the methods I have yet to trial is 'podcasting' as a means for students to recap on a session. This method holds uncertainty amongst my colleagues as it is thought that it will offer an easy opportunity to opt out of attendance for students and promote the culture of learning from a computer. This may be partly due to the experience of one colleague (now retired) who fully embraced blackboard, uploaded all of his lectures for the academic year with instant access and watched his class size diminish as the students opted to read them at home. As Marshall, Austin and Hale recommend in their paper 'Enhanced podcasts for enhanced learning', this

medium is 'a way of delivering support outside the classroom, a way of enhancing the support, not changing it.' Contrary to this, they also mention the replacement of the 'studio culture with a virtual one' (p.423). This, as with many of the papers raises questions for debate and the demand for support for successful implementation.

This book provides useful coverage of tried and tested methods of enhancing the student experience through some very good teaching and learning cases. However, it is up to you or your group to consider the best way to apply the area that inspires as each paper is quite a personal account. As with all books in the Teaching and Learning sector it is advisable to keep an open mind; what works well with one group may fall foul with another! A degree of flexibility will be developed through adapting some of the methods given in this book and, through trial and error (leaving your comfort zone), your confidence in teaching to cater for the variety of student learning types will hopefully become more engaging for the student.