Book review

Allan, B. 2016. *Emerging strategies for supporting student learning. A practical guide for librarians and educators.* London: Facet. 169pp. 978-1783300709 £49.95. Pbk.

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As identified in the subtitle, this book is aimed at those professionals working in Higher Education (HE) who have an impact on student learning, as well as staff developers, educational technologists, educational development project workers, educational change agents and students doing library studies with a view to work in HE. The author is an experienced trainer in HE libraries with a doctorate in education and a track record for enriching student learning. The book is published at a time when sound pedagogical approaches are increasingly becoming a requirement from both academics and those working in learning support areas. It offers a clear and accurate analysis of today's learning landscape from the changing student populations to the evolution of key concepts in teaching and learning. It also offers valuable advice on lifelong professional development, including a self-reflective assessment very similar to the Higher Education Academy (HEA) e-portfolio. In brief, this book does exactly what it promises, it offers a practical guide that is accessible and yet authoritative in its matrix.

The paperback itself is of a relatively small size but, as already suggested, comprehensive in nature and therefore valuable to both seasoned practitioners, as a reminder, and those just starting out. In retrospect, I would have benefited greatly from a guide like this when I first started working as a qualified librarian. It would have helped me to understand my role in supporting student learning and it would have given me the confidence to do my job knowing I was adopting sound pedagogical methods whilst addressing existing HE concerns.

The chapters' layout follows a functional rationale that starts by introducing the reader to the evolving landscape that is HE with its preoccupations with students' experience, flexible learning and successfully equipping students to contribute to the global economy. It then moves on to 'Working with students' in Chapter 2, a section dedicated to shining a light on the diverse needs of the students and what they can expect from their institution, such as reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities, flexible support for part-time students, the ability to physically and virtually connect to university services at any time; learning style is also addressed in this chapter along with two approaches, favouring multiple intelligences and the VARK system (the visual, auditory, reading or writing and kinaesthetic modalities of learning).

Chapter 3 looks at literacy and its various aspects, from information literacy, to digital literacy, to metaliteracy and digital badges, all part of the current academic libraries' agenda; examples and case studies helpfully contextualise the topic and offer practical ideas. Chapter 4 is dedicated to students' employability at the end of their course and how libraries can help by providing students with work experience or collaborative projects.

Chapter 5 gets to the nitty gritty of teaching and learning with a selection of approaches including Kolb's learning cycle, Laurillard's conversational framework for the use of learning technologies, Entwistle's teaching for understanding at university, Land and Meyer's threshold concepts and flexible pedagogies by the HEA. Allan concludes the chapter with a workable approach to the various perspectives on teaching that is tailored to librarians' professional practice as supporter of student learning.

Chapter 6 provides a hands-on approach to supporting students through learning activities applicable to face-to-face teaching, blended or online material. One key aspect is 'action planning',

which asks the students to decide how they will put into practice what they've learnt. Having experienced this myself at a staff development workshop, I know how effective it is in influencing tangible outcomes. Another very useful point is on learning reflection, for which Allan draws from personal experience.

Chapter 7 is about 'Making it happen' a step by step guide to designing teaching activities that uses Bloom's taxonomy to distinguish between the various levels of learning, from students being able to remember, to being able to use the lesson teaching to create a learning output, just like the 'action planning' phase of the previous chapter. The basic design section offers a lesson structured around four questions: 'why, what, how and what if' the latter allowing students to query about situations outside of the covered content. Chapter 8 offers practical applications of the ideas put forward in the previous chapter.

Chapter 9 looks at teaching delivery, both face-to-face and online. It uses very helpful checklists to follow when preparing for a session, from the work needed beforehand, to the actual delivery, to how to end a session.

Chapter 10 recommends professionals to be aware of their own institution's approach to quality assurance and enhancement to inform both the design and evaluation of their teaching activities accordingly. Although evaluating students' learning in library sessions does not contribute to students' marks, it should still be monitored for quality improvements.

Chapter 11 concludes with a very helpful section on professional development and plenty of examples of how to keep up to date with changes in HE and the evolving technologies that support teaching and learning, social media being a relatively easy option. The key area of this section is to be found in the recommendations for managing immediate professional needs, long-term career goals, and the benefits of producing a professional portfolio inclusive of the above as well as a track record of one's progress. The latter is a formal requirement in other professional practices and probably an overdue addition to that of academic librarians and other educators alike.

Whether you're a seasoned professional or just at the beginning of your career, this book is a must read with invaluable and accessible information on current pedagogical theory for HE, practical examples of teaching activities, vital checklists for teaching delivery and precious recommendations for future professional development.