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.