



## Book Review

# Innovations in Learning and Teaching: Showcasing New Approaches to Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

Penman, C., & Foster, M. (2016), *Innovations in Learning and Teaching: Showcasing new Approaches to Higher Education*. Edinburgh: Merchiston Publishing.

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**Keywords:** student-centred; digital technology; higher education pedagogy; transforming assessment.

### Review

Henry Mintzberg, the guru of management research and education, characterises management as a mixture of science, art and craft. The same could be said about higher education pedagogy. If this is indeed the case, then this provides an understanding as to why publications such as *Innovations in Learning and Teaching* are both necessary and important. Necessary because researching, reflecting upon and refining practice is what higher education practitioners do; and important because all higher education practitioners 'stand on the shoulders of others' who have published or made available via other means their insights, findings, suggestions and recommendations, and have thereby contributed to the scholarship of teaching and learning. A further consideration in this context is about what higher education actually is and is subject to ongoing change, driven by government policy, changing regulatory frameworks, knowledge creation from within the academy, and technological developments, to name but a few current influences. Higher education pedagogy therefore needs to develop, evolve, absorb new ideas and create platforms for sharing with and inspiring others, which is what *Innovations in Learning and Teaching* is all about.

The book grew out of the annual conference organised by the Teaching Fellows Community at Edinburgh Napier University, and the desire to share developments in practice more widely. Helpfully the wide-ranging contents of the book are divided into four sections: importing new philosophies into course design (3 chapters); developing a student-centred programme of study (4 chapters); digital technology and innovative practices in the classroom (3 chapters); and developing a global outlook through pedagogical activities (2 chapters). The themes of the chapters include: expanding the array of pedagogical approaches used within a particular discipline; conceptualising pedagogical approaches; refinements to pedagogy and reflections on the impact of these; exploring new modes and methods of delivery; transforming assessment; creating richer learning experiences through the (re)design of learning tasks; and the utilisation of learning technologies to forge different kinds of learning experiences. I discerned two meta-themes that permeate the different chapters of the book: a focus upon and exploration of student motivation and engagement with their learning, and collaborative/social constructionist approaches to learning and pedagogy.

All chapters have an abstract, a set of keywords, an introduction, and provide a context for the intervention/initiative and a review of relevant and supporting background literature. Methodologically, the chapters deploy a variety of approaches to exploring practice: some are based on reflections by the authors on their experiences; some draw upon the analysis of qualitative or quantitative data. Some readers may feel that slightly more emphasis could have been placed on describing and exploring methodology and methods of inquiry, but my own view is that this would have detracted from the key purpose of the book as outlined in the title: *showcasing new approaches to higher education*. Chapters conclude with key findings, recommendations where appropriate, and suggestions for future directions.

*Innovations in Learning and Teaching* is a pleasure to read. It is a well-structured text, is well-edited and the chapters are the right length to both explore the topic adequately and maintain the reader's interest. The most experienced higher education practitioner will be both inspired and find something new to reflect upon through reading the book. In this way it makes a useful and rich contribution to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Readers will find their own 'gems' within the chapters. For me it was Mabel Victoria's chapter on 'using selfie-inspired activities to enhance social relations and encourage self-reflexivity'. What a great idea!