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Article:

Herrick, T. (2010) Book reviews: Teaching in lifelong learning: a guide to theory and practice. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 36 (2). pp. 254-256. ISSN 0260-7476

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02607471003651946>

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Journal of Education for Teaching* on 17/03/2010, available online:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/02607471003651946>.

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Teaching in lifelong learning: a guide to theory and practice, edited by James Avis, Roy Fisher and Ron Thompson, Maidenhead, Open University Press, 2009, 320 pp., £23.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-335-23469-1

This is an excellent book for teachers entering the lifelong learning sector, especially in further education (FE), and will be of interest to experienced practitioners throughout the field. It offers a detailed introduction to the sector, combining scholarly research with practical advice, and intelligently balancing a range of different points of view. With over 30 contributors, this is avowedly a multi-vocal work, and one that emphasises the diversity of lifelong learning in FE, higher education (HE), and the public and charitable sectors in the UK. It covers many topics relevant to educational practitioners and researchers, and is equally valuable to dip into as it is to read from start to finish.

The book is divided into three parts, roughly moving towards classroom experience as the work unfolds. The first, 'Introduction to the lifelong learning sector', is an excellent context-setting collection of essays, covering the structure, history, and some contemporary concerns of the sector. A critical focus is maintained throughout, and contested areas such as the skills agenda or globalisation are explained with insight, clarity, and candour. The second part focuses on teaching, exploring topics such as curriculum, assessment, technology, and reflective practice. This part is particularly strong for offering new entrants into the profession advice from experienced practitioners, and a road map of research sources and findings. The final section addresses some details of work in the sector, and is clearly oriented at the newly-qualified teacher about to take up their first post. Any choosing to keep this book near them throughout their training and early practice, will be doing themselves a great favour. The balance between pragmatic advice and academic research is one of the great strengths of this book, and the two threads are woven skilfully together throughout all the essays – for example, theories of managerialism rub shoulders with advice about sensitivity towards social practices in the staff room. The research is impressively up-to-date and wide-ranging, and while accommodating a diversity of methodological positions, explicitly tends towards one informed by an emphasis on social justice. This doubtless resonates with many working in the field, and allows extremely helpful links to be made between work in the lifelong sector and the wider social context in which this takes place. As one of the essays has it, 'an interest in doing the best for our learners involves engagement with social practices beyond the classroom' (38), and this book is excellent at offering tools to new teachers for critically understanding their practices.

As such, it will also be useful to established practitioners, and is an inspiring reminder of the power and responsibility that comes from working with adults in formal education. It is a shame that the voice of the learner does not come through these writings as clearly as it might. The richness and excitement that adult learners bring to the classroom is muted here, and the book treats readers as if they are already committed to the profession, rather than seeking to persuade them of its (perhaps not immediately apparent) charms. The chapter offering information and reflections about learners in the sector plays as well as it can on a sticky wicket, given that the only characteristic many commentators identify in the student body is its diversity. Finally, there is also a hint that, despite its plurality, the default examples and problems for several chapters are drawn from FE, perhaps underplaying the differences and similarities that might be found with other areas of work. This tendency is most visible in the final section where the focus on a particular teaching environment becomes more pressing, given the concern to prepare newly-qualified teachers for their first post. Diversity is a tricky thing to capture, even in a book with 30 authors, and this text manages far better than most.

Had space allowed, it would have been interesting to see the authors build on the two chapters covering new technologies and e-learning. While they are good at identifying the tools available, and offering some suggestions for use, the potential Web 2.0 technologies such as social networking open for adult education, was not heavily emphasised. With potential to overcome geographical and social barriers, and to occupy a third space between formal and informal learning, social networking technologies offer many resources with which to reconceptualise lifelong learning. The sector's future contribution may be more geared towards supporting the

development of higher-level skills rather than providing information direct to learners, and that is a possibility with significant implications.

At its best, however, this book is an intelligent, affable, and clear-sighted companion to practitioners in the lifelong learning sector. Chapters such as that on Practical teaching, are an excellent synthesis of research, classroom experience, and the critical insights provided by earlier chapters. It steers clear of the 'how-to' format, and respects multiple perspectives and experiences; and indeed is most akin to a welltaught lesson where you are left with an awareness of the fundamental issues, a long list of questions, and an indication of resources that will help you take them further. Unafraid to tackle knotty areas such as the relationship of subject specialism and pedagogical knowledge, contested in theory, practice, and policy, the book offers a handle on the richness and complexity of factors that shape a working teacher's life. As such, it is a very helpful mirror and guide for those entering, or established in, this diverse and rewarding sector.

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