



## Book Review: Rich Pickings: Creative professional development activities for University Lecturers

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What seems like a very long time ago, in what now feels like a very different world, I attended a book launch. It was an opportunity to listen to, talk and laugh with colleagues and new acquaintances alike, and to hear the author's thoughts and musings. I enjoyed it very much. The book in question was *Rich Pickings. Creative professional development activities for University Lecturers* by Daphne Loads, previously of the University of Edinburgh. As I now turn to look again at Daphne's book there is more than a little joy, after so many months of hammering away at the keyboard and living in a world of digital documents, in admiring its beautifully illustrated cover, flicking through the pages and smiling at the quirky doodles drawn by Geoffrey Baines.

After some time away from my initial reading of the book I've returned to it to see what insight it might be able to provide in a time where remote or blended learning has become our new way of working to a much greater extent than ever before; and for the short term at least, perhaps to the exclusion of on campus face-to-face activities with our students. Although a slim volume, *Rich Pickings* is indeed a treasure trove of delightful vignettes plus some really useful ideas. It comprises 26 chapters, which are mainly only a page or two in length but feel much longer in terms of the richness of the material, and while it was written by an academic developer this is not a 'how to run a class' type of book. It is much, much more than that. It is provocation, it is challenge, it is a tiny, power-packed ideas generator, and for me, it is a book for our time.

Intriguingly, Daphne's words appear to be speaking to us as if they were written yesterday, in response to the current environment where we all have to re-imagine ourselves as teachers and our students as learners within what is a very differently constructed learning experience. I was struck, in particular, by chapter 8 'You Gotta have Soul' which takes us right back to that most basic of questions: 'So what does it take to be a university teacher?'. While chapter 10, which focuses on Mezirow's concept of transformative learning, asks the reader to recall a time in their life when there was 'a fundamental shift in the way you made sense of the world and your place in it'. That time may be now, for every single reader. Chapter 19 looks at 'trouble' in learning, albeit in a very positive way and chapter 22 at threshold concepts, in relation to 'the student-as-vampire'; which may cast an entirely different light on a familiar concept.

The short and thoughtful nature of the chapters in this volume are a result of earlier versions being shared through blog posts but they lose nothing in the re-telling. Others are new and introduce the reader to authors who may be as yet unknown, or remind them of seminal texts. The chapter titles alone are sufficient to reel in any reader: 'A Stupid Way to Eat a Peach', 'Taming the Wild Profusion of Existing Things', and (perhaps my favourite) "Ankle-Deep in Aviation Fuel" or "More than Violets Knee-Deep?". I defy anyone not to be tempted. I have had the privilege and the pleasure of seeing Daphne 'in action' in her work as an academic developer and amongst the many things that I took away from her sessions, the stand-out memories for me are her enormous smile, her sense of calm, and her ability to make everyone leave the room thinking differently about things from when they sat down. The distillation of Daphne is in this volume. She might push your boundaries; but always gently and with your well-being at heart. She might challenge you to think and to share and to be playful, approaching topics from a different direction. Daphne helped everyone to create something new and meaningful. These all feel like admirable ways forward at this time; and at any time.

### Biography

Lorraine Anderson is Head of the Academic Skills Centre and an Assistant Director in Student Services, at the University of Dundee. She has a particular interest in academic literacies development for both students and colleagues and has co-authored several books, including (with Peter Kahn) *Developing your Teaching. Towards Excellence*. 2019. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Routledge: Abingdon and (with Gordon Spark) *Pass your Exam*. 2020. Sage. Lorraine is a Fellow of the RSA and Principal Fellow of the HEA. She is also a member of the Cloud Appreciation Society.