



Book Review

Professional development for practitioners in academia. *Pracademia*

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Pracademia may be a new word to you. However, while you may not be immediately familiar with the term, you will be aware of the academic colleagues with professional industry experience who are the pracademics. *Professional Development for Practitioners in Academia. Pracademia*, edited by Jill Dickinson and Teri-Lisa Griffiths, is a highly readable and relatable (more of this later) collection. Divided into three sections, the book covers pracademic identities, professional development, and teaching practice. The authors bring an international perspective, from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, to a discussion of research and reflections on the topic of pracademia. Each chapter includes an 'At a Glance' opening list of key points and concludes with a 'Points for Reflection' set of questions. This structure provides the reader with a way into using the text as a prompt for deeper thought, reflection and interrogation of practice in relation to the ideas advanced in each chapter. As a result, the book is very user-friendly and chapters can be dipped into in light of the reader's interests; however, beyond the CPD potential offered by this book it is also highly readable, through the authors' stories, reflections and lived experiences as pracademics.

At the very beginning of the text (p.1), the editors note the coining of the term 'pracademics' by Volpe and Chandler in 1999, so it has been in use for almost a quarter of a century, yet, it is perhaps not surprising that the first section of the book focuses on pracademic identities; or that the editors' concluding chapter continues this theme, highlighting the variety of terms used by the authors themselves throughout the book for those 'with both practitioner and academic experience' (p.276). These are many and various but perhaps the most appealing - if not the most glamorous - is that discussed by Abinash Panda (chapter 18) of pracademic as 'boundary spanner'. This book aims to reach a breadth of academic readership and it is perhaps in this ongoing discussion and evolution of pracademic identit(ies) that this will be achieved. The identity of academics and developers is constantly evolving, and more often than not being multiplied rather than clarified, through the addition of the numerous 'hats' that we are required to wear. We can all then identify with the position of the pracademic, if not their immediate experience.

The chapters in part one cover a good deal of what will be immediately relatable to all colleagues who have ever moved from being a student to a teacher or gained a promotion, and found themselves dealing with a step from expert to novice (chapter 3) or wrestling with imposter syndrome (chapter 5) and in so doing, sought to find their own 'people' (chapter 7). However, this familiarity does not take away from the importance of the lived experience of pracademic colleagues and part two, dealing with professional development, has much to offer and share from the perspective of the pracademic community, discussing and reflecting on transitions (chapter 8), the use of artefacts (chapter 9), and both networking and collaboration (chapter 11) as part of a rich approach to professional development.

Part three covers teaching practice and it is perhaps here that we are most familiar with the benefits, through currency and authenticity, that practitioners bring to the academic context, not least as part of an approach to employability (chapter 13). This runs the risk, of course, of pracademics' experience being used in the most reductionist manner; whilst the more time spent in academia dilutes the immediacy of that practice-based experience (p.4). Both of which raise issues again for the identity of pracademics. However, it is through an ongoing discussion of this pracademic identity as a key part of the wider identities of colleagues across the higher education sector; the sharing of narratives, experiences and reflections; and collaboration of thought and practice, that these issues can continue to be fruitfully explored. The work here of Jill Dickinson and Teri-Lee Griffiths, along with all of their pracademic colleagues, in bringing this issue to greater attention makes an excellent contribution to the discussion.

It may be too late to ask for a copy of this thought-provoking, scholarly and yet very human book for Christmas this year, but do put it on your librarian's list for 2024. You won't be disappointed.

References

Volpe, M. R., & Chandler, D. (1999). Resolving conflicts in institutions of higher education: Challenges for pracademics. *CNCR-Hewlett Foundation Seed Grant White Papers*, 8.
<https://readingroom.law.gsu.edu/seedgrant/8>

Biography

Lorraine Anderson was previously an Assistant Director, Student Services and Head of the Academic Skills Centre at the University of Dundee. She now concentrates on her work as an author and editor and as a tutor in the Centre for Medical Education at Dundee. Lorraine is also a member of the Cloud Appreciation Society.