

## **Book Review: *Introduction to University Teaching* by Richard Bale and Mary Seabrook**

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*The Postgraduate Pedagogies editorial team were invited to review this new guide to teaching and learning in Higher Education (HE), which is aimed specifically at early career academics, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), and postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers. In line with the journal's aim to offer GTAs a first occasion to publish their reflections on their teaching practice, we saw this too as an excellent opportunity for GTAs to explore the literature around teaching and learning, and to gain experience of academic book reviewing.*

*We invited interested reviewers to contact us and were delighted that two GTAs with very different backgrounds and experiences expressed their interest in the task. They agreed to write the review as a collaborative 'conversation piece', focusing on how the book is relevant to them in their roles as GTAs and how others in their position might also find it of interest.*

## **Introduction**

*Chang Liu (CL)*: I am a postgraduate researcher at Newcastle University, researching second language writing and critical thinking. I have three years of teaching experience at a Chinese university and two years of teaching experience here at Newcastle. I put myself forward as a book reviewer to participate in a conversation of literary criticism, which is an excellent way to gain early publishing experience and different to my experience of other academic and report writing. Reviewing this book allowed me to critically evaluate how learning theories can support the development of my teaching practice and develop inclusive teaching practice to better satisfy students' learning needs.

*Steve Hoey (SH)*: I recently started a doctorate at the University of Hull researching solutions to school exclusion. I have 18 years' experience of teaching in secondary schools. For me, reviewing the book was an opportunity to find out more about teaching and learning in HE and a fantastic opportunity for my own professional development.

### **Tell us about the book.**

*CL & SH*: It contains everything you need to know about teaching and learning in UK universities. Not only is it a great introduction to those just starting their teaching careers in HE, but also a comprehensive professional development book. It provides readers with insights into the essential elements to

consider at the planning stage of teaching, and ideas on how to make teaching and learning effective in specific contexts (for example, large group teaching in lectures, small groups teaching, laboratories, project supervision).

It also introduces learning theories which encourage you to conceptualise what, how and why to teach. Aspects of teaching design are also discussed in this book, which is helpful to critically evaluate your lesson plans. The book emphasises the importance of inclusive teaching practice and the use of different digital technologies to facilitate interaction in supporting learning and teaching. While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on using digital technologies in education is unquestionable, teachers still need guidance on how to effectively use digital technologies to promote authentic collaboration and interaction in the classroom. This book introduces a range of hands-on activities to integrate digital technologies into teaching practice.

**Reflecting on the book overall, do you think it will be relevant to you as an early career HE teacher?**

*SH:* Very much so. I have many years' experience of teaching in secondary schools but teaching in HE is very different because there is a higher degree of flexibility and more opportunity to really explore issues and challenge student thinking. The book is packed with relevant information and each chapter offers the opportunity for real learning. Teaching

is not easy work, and this books really makes you think about the what, why, when, who, where and the how.

It also focuses on professional development and makes clear reference to Advance HE and the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF): what the organisation does, how to evidence and map your practice against the UKPSF, and how applying for an Advance HE fellowship (a professional recognition of an individual's commitment to professionalism in learning and teaching in HE), will benefit your career. This was excellent especially because many people new to HE will not have come across this before.

I also appreciated just how relevant and up to date the information was especially considering the impact of COVID-19. For example, Chapter 8 on digital technologies made me think about the bigger picture whilst focusing on the finer practical details and offered excellent advice throughout.

*CL:* As someone relatively new to teaching and supporting learning in UK higher education, I was greatly inspired when reading this book. I am going to apply for Advance HE Associate Fellowship, and the book is very helpful in showing how my practice aligns with the UKPSF: all chapters are mapped against the UKPSF dimensions. In addition, the learning theories introduced in this book helped me to conceptualise how I teach and how my students learn. This will give me confidence that my ways of teaching are grounded in

theory, which could be helpful for me to reflect on additional academic and professional development needs.

I recommended this book to my colleagues who have less teaching experience and are also applying for Associate Fellowship. They also gave positive feedback on the book, commenting that it is very helpful for them to evidence and reflect on their teaching practice and gain fellowship.

**What was one thing that stood out to you?**

*CL:* The case studies in this book stood out to me, for two reasons. Firstly, these case studies help to illustrate the points made in the chapters, which makes the abstract theoretical perspectives accessible and help me to critically consider how knowledge of theory underpins aspects of my teaching practice. For example, in chapter 2, case study 2.2 provides examples of how to 'scaffold' students' learning using seminar planning sheets. Secondly, these case studies are concrete examples of reflective writing from successful Advance HE fellowship applications, which are very helpful for those who, like me, are drafting Associate Fellowship applications.

*SH:* I really liked the overall structure of the book with clear chapters that incorporated a range of engaging activities and points for reflection. This made it easily accessible and user-friendly.

Each chapter had three clear learning outcomes which indicated what you should be able to do after reading the chapter. These gave real focus to each chapter and made it seem simple, yet each chapter was full of excellent information and interactive tasks. The opportunities for reflection involved deep work. In chapter 9 the reflection task where you had to consider your own experiences really made you stop and think about 'you' and 'your why'. Making you consider the same questions from the student's perspective provoked real empathy.

Each chapter had a discussion section, which included relevant scenarios and case studies, making each chapter relevant and thought provoking. In chapter 10, the case studies gave some great suggestions about assessment and feedback. For example, case study 10.1 highlights the importance of interaction when providing feedback in small groups and case study 10.2 is about effective written feedback. The 'over to you' section at the end of each chapter aids self-reflection and more importantly, action.

**Is there anything in the book that you might implement in your own teaching?**

*SH:* In every chapter there was so much that you could implement and narrowing it down to one thing is very difficult. I think that the way each chapter prompted you to think and reflect was my key takeaway. For example, in chapter 12 there

was some excellent advice on evaluation strategies and how to use student feedback to develop your teaching further. Chapter 7 also gives lots of ideas on working with individual students and supervising student projects. Developing these professional relationships with students is crucial and the references to mentoring and coaching skills and the potential challenges is excellent. The case studies in this chapter add real experience and the activities an opportunity to reflect. For example, the proposed activity using the GROW coaching model (Goals Reality Options Will) to plan a one-to-one session is excellent.

*CL:* I will implement the storyboard template (chapter 8, Figure 8.1) to plan and design a sequence of online learning. The storyboard is a very useful tool because it helps to make online learning active and engaging. It focuses on the design of activities, allowing teachers to visually represent how students will progress through the course and providing more opportunities for students to engage actively. This serves to ensure that students are active participants in the course rather than passive recipients of online content.

**Is there anything that you thought was missing or would have liked the authors to explore further?**

*CL:* It would be great if the authors could provide advice on how to link sustainability to employability as a key skill set students need in the rapidly changing sectors in which they will graduate. Sustainability in education is the process of

meeting our students' needs without compromising the ability of future generations and can be introduced through the implementation of a combination of teaching practices. For example, Education for Sustainable Development could be embedded in our curriculum through creative collaborations between academic teams and professional service teams.

*SH:* Something I would have found useful is how to manage professional relationships with other colleagues. How to network, build trust and become a valued member of staff. Navigating this can be tricky especially when you are new to a department.

**Do you know of any similar books or guides to teaching in HE? How does this compare?**

*CL:* I have read two books about teaching in HE, namely, *'Better Teaching, More Learning: Strategies for Success in Postsecondary Settings'* by James R. Davis and *'Cooperative Learning for Higher Education Faculty'* Barbara J. Millis and Philip G. Jr. Cottell which were published in 1993 and 1997 respectively. Although both books provide guidance about creating cooperative learning communities within classrooms and enhancing instructors' performance in their teaching practice, these two books are out-of-date. In contrast, this book provides up-to-date and practical case studies, also explaining how various digital technologies can be incorporated into both face-to-face and online teaching. This has encouraged me to reflect on how to effectively use



different digital technologies and resources in a blended learning format to enhance interaction.

*SH:* I have recently completed a course called 'Passport to University Teaching' at my university and I found this book a really great companion to the course. There is some guidance and advice on teaching available on social media too, but this book is a brilliant one stop guide to everything that I need to know. It is up to date and full of relevant information.

**Finally, how would you summarise the book for another reader?**

*SH:* With excellent academic references, clear figures, and links to further resources, each chapter offers a very comprehensive overview.

The book is perfect for both those new to teaching and those wanting to use it for professional development. There really is something for everyone and many of the activities could certainly be used for professional dialogue with a range of staff involved in HE.

*CL:* Overall, this book provides engaging, accessible and interactive resources about the key aspects of teaching and learning practices. It offers an insightful overview about UK HE and allows the reader to really reflect on their identity in teaching.

