Book Review: Teaching, Learning and Study Skills: A Guide for Tutors

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BOOK REVIEWS

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Teaching, Learning and Study Skills: A Guide for Tutors by Tom Burns and Sandra Sinfield. London: SAGE Publications, 2004. ISBN 1–4129–0069–7 (pbk), 1–4129–0068–9 (hbk).

I approached this book thinking I knew what it would contain. I was expecting clear guidance aimed at tutors who wish to support the learning of non-traditional students and indeed I was not disappointed, but this book also does a lot more than provide practical advice. It presents a rigorous analysis of the arguments surrounding the 'access and widening participation' and the 'skills in HE' debates. The conceptual framework provided helps tutors to understand how the pressure points and tensions in the sector have arisen, as well as what practical steps they can take to support student learning on their courses.

The message that underpins this book is that the skills development activities that can bridge the gap between the starting point for a non-traditional student and the point that he/she needs to reach in order to ensure a successful university learning experience are activities that will support the learning of all students. The skills addressed in this book are those learning activities that all universities require students to be able to undertake. The role of the learning/academic development tutor supporting students is to make the expectations of universities explicit to all students. Step by step this book explains to tutors the journey that they need to undertake with students in order to ensure their students experience learning success.

To return to the practical support for tutors that *Teaching, Learning and Study Skills* offers, strategies, ideas and photocopiable resources are included. Each focus area is the subject of a chapter, and each chapter is structured in a broadly similar way. The skill area is introduced and key issues are examined, and the authors explain why the skill area is needed to be part of a student's repertoire of skills. They explain how they have addressed such issues previously, provide activities to encourage tutors to reflect upon the particular skill and give examples of different learning activities that can be used to help the student to develop in the area in question. Lesson plans, teaching resources and session notes are provided across a range of study skill areas including some less often considered such as promoting student self-confidence.

My feeling is that once having read the book and therefore having a clearer understanding of the issues involved, tutors will be keen to develop further the materials provided in order to tailor them to their particular subject area, working contexts and students rather than simply using them 'off the peg'.

Overall this book is an excellent example of scholarship and professional experience in the areas of non-traditional students, access and widening participation and skills in higher education. The book can be read and enjoyed as an academic text and pored over as a source of excellent practical advice.

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Reflection to Transformation: A Self-help Book for Teachers edited by Nick Zepke, Dean Nugent and Linda Leach. New Zealand: Dunmore Press, 2003. ISBN 0–86469–435–0.

'If you help adults learn this book is for you.' A confident opening statement but a promise that is, I believe, fulfilled by this 'self-help' book.

This book was written for teachers in the early years of a career in teaching adults but it also presents an interesting opportunity for the experienced teacher to critically reflect upon personal assumptions about:

• being a reflective practitioner,
• working with learners,
• supporting learning and teaching, and
• contexts for teaching and learning.

The book opens with a very useful overview of reflection, including practical strategies for becoming, or encouraging others to become, a reflective practitioner, followed by ideas for encouraging reflective practice. This work is scholarly and clearly underpinned by a wealth of knowledge about the theories relating to reflection. In addition, the writer's practical experience of supporting learners as they begin to engage with reflective practice is evident. The ability to move from theory to some very practical ideas to try out in sessions is a feature of this book and one which will make it very popular with those trying to help learners develop reflective practice.

A major focus of this text is the consideration of ways of working with learners to bring about transformation in their learning. Themes include the importance of interaction in bringing about learning, whether or not this interaction takes place face-to face or online, and the need for power-sharing. Consideration of inclusive teaching and the need to value diversity follows; again the theory is clearly illustrated by reference to the extensive practical experience of the chapter authors and guidance for those wishing to experiment with some of their ideas. The discussion about the limits of 'individualism' compared with 'interdependence' is particularly powerful and gave this seasoned practitioner food for thought. Moving on from the direct support of learning that takes place within sessions, the development of the learning environment is considered. The chapter by Robin Graham, 'Preparing for Teaching', is an aide memoire on all that needs to be done in preparation for