

## **Book Review**

### **Lochtie, D., Stork, A. and Walker, B.W. (2022) *The Higher Education Personal Tutor's and Adviser's Companion* St Albans: Critical Publishing**

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For many years, personal tutoring has been an under-researched area. Academic staff have found themselves in the front line supporting students, with little guidance available from the learning and teaching literature. Meanwhile, as Lochtie et al (2022) highlight, its importance continues to grow given the diverse needs of students and the pressure to align with the Teaching Excellence Framework Metrics.

Hence, when Lochtie et al published a text on personal tutoring back in 2018 it was an extremely welcome resource for tutors, researchers, student services staff and management. This new (2022) text takes us further and provides 25 case studies illustrating how to translate the theory in the first book into practice.

The book is even more timely given the pressures faced by HE generally and individual students particularly in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic aftermath, and the significant changes to teaching and learning, such as the increased adoption of blended approaches. The authors conclude that:

belonging and connectedness have arguably never been more vital and their key agents, personal tutors, never more crucial

(Lochtie et al 2022 p.xvi).

One problem facing the editors of a book containing wide ranging case studies is how to organise and form connections between them. Rather than try to pummel them into ill-fitting categories, the editors have arranged the case studies alphabetically by author, and produced a “themes” table which is near the start of the book. This table is split into four main themes, encompassing models of personal tutoring, the diverse range of personal tutoring practice, supporting students and student populations, and finally developing personal tutoring. This is not only helpful signposting for readers with specific interests, it is also cross-referenced to the relevant section of the companion (2018) text.

Each chapter consists of one case study, and the beginning and ending of each follows a broadly uniform structure – again, quite an achievement on the part of the editors. Following an initial chapter focused themes table, the case study is summarised in a succinct introduction or background; at the end of each case study is a conclusion or “key messages”. Finally, there is a set of “critical reflections” to consider, which indeed could also be used by staff developers.

However, here the similarity ends. The case studies are diverse, including scholarly research and more informal stories of practice, with authors from academic, leadership and student support roles. Some have one author, some have many (indeed, up to eight) authors. 25 UK institutions are represented, including long-established and more modern universities. Some of the case studies address broad issues, such as whole institutional, and indeed sector wide, approaches, and the fundamental concepts and language which underpin personal tutoring. Others are focused on specific aspects of

personal tutoring, such as the format of sessions, training for tutors, promoting employability, supporting “at risk” students and coaching.

Examples of innovative practice elaborated in the book include: using early career researchers to provide “near-peer” teaching on academic and employability skills to first years (case study 1); asking student volunteers to discuss selected themes in online “listening rooms” as a research method to evaluate institutional practice (case study 16); and asking students to map the groups which impact on their studies to foster reflection on their social location and changing identity (case study 18). Identity is also a key theme of case study 25, in which research was conducted with personal tutors and three distinct tutor identities emerged: the ‘Hero’, the ‘Professional’ and the ‘Nurturer’. In terms of training for tutors, case study 22 describes a problem based approach, where tutors work in groups to provide responses to simulated tutees who regularly contact them for guidance; tutor responses to the fictitious tutees are then discussed in class.

The rich range of case studies makes this an essential text which would be of great value to all involved in supporting students directly or organising and managing such support. Practitioners are likely to find something relevant to their own circumstances, as well as approaches and questions which might challenge them to further enrich their own practice. The structure of the book is ideal for “dippers”, who can pick out relevant case studies, although the introductory chapters are a must, providing a concise introduction to the state of play in personal tutoring as well as explaining how to navigate the book. Cover-to-cover readers might be a little disconcerted by the absence of a summary at the end of the book, although this could be addressed by re-reading the Foreword. Leaders and managers of personal tutors should in particular pay attention to the call to action in the Foreword – to reconstitute personal tutoring to ensure that tutors are enabled to curate the future learning experience, promoting inclusion and student success.

There is still work to be done in order to enhance the training of personal tutors and push tutoring up institutional agendas. However, the fact that practitioners from a significant number of institutions are not only researching and enhancing their approach to personal tutoring, but also prepared to share their good practice, is highly positive – maybe this key issue is finally moving from the sidelines into the spotlight.

## **References**

Lochtie, D., McIntosh, E., Stork, A. and Walker, B.W. (2018) *Effective Personal Tutoring in Higher Education* St Albans: Critical Publishing

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