

## **Book Review:**

### **Bale, R. and Seabrook, M. (2021) *Introduction to University Teaching*. Sage publications.**

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Right from the start, this book emphasises its friendly and accessible structure and tone, making it a perfect companion for anyone supporting learning or beginning to teach in higher education. It outlines the range of roles that this book would suit, from doctoral researchers to librarians and careers advisors. Student engagement, active learning, identity and values are all salient themes in this book, as it explores learning and teaching from a student-centred viewpoint. The structure also means colleagues could read it cover-to-cover or select information to refresh, trying new ideas depending on when the topic is needed. The construction includes a range of material types, chunked and varied, which helps makes this an enjoyable and accessible read: concepts, theories, activities, reflections, tables and most powerfully, real experiences from across the sector captured in short vignettes.

The book states that each chapter is mapped to Advance HE's Fellowship framework in the hope of encouraging readers to use this book, and the experiences gained from it, to apply for Fellowship status. Advance HE's Professional Standards framework has been revised (2023) since the publication of this book and it is a shame that it no longer maps exactly. However, the book is still a really useful tool for anyone developing their knowledge, understanding and experience of teaching in higher education, and therefore building evidence and reflective practice ready for applying for Fellowship.

Chapter 1 begins with a wider lens on the higher education sector, helping the reader to situate their practice within the macro and micro factors across the UK. This is a useful section of the book that would appeal to international colleagues and those new to tertiary too. This chapter outlines some historical and contextual influences, as well as introducing key acronyms such as Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), National Student Survey (NSS) and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). This chapter scaffolds thinking about the reader's own identity and core values, within higher education. Notably, it also includes commentary on staff boundaries, encouraging teachers to know what they are to avoid, just as much as what they are to do, for their own workload balance and wellbeing.

Chapter 2 considers how we learn and therefore how we teach, with useful provocations about the reader's own past experiences of education as well as their current context. The fundamentals of didactic versus active, student-centred versus teacher-centred are also outlined, whilst introducing theories such as behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism. This chapter emphasises the important and challenging role of an educator, and how understanding cognition, brain development and psychology empowers us as better teachers. Research informed practice is evidenced here for its impact and potential. The learning styles myth is politely but clearly quashed.

All chapters begin with an outline of the learning outcomes for the chapter. This is a simple but effective way for readers to familiarise themselves with the structure and value of well-written learning outcomes. This is then furthered on pages 46-50 (Chapter 3), where learning design and writing learning outcomes are explored in more detail. All the expected theorists are included in chapter 3's course design and planning teaching, such as Biggs and Tang's constructive alignment and Bloom's taxonomy. This is useful grounding to ensure new colleagues are aware and equipped with the populist models, from which they can discover new and perhaps alternative ways of designing curricular.

Chapter 4 was my favourite section of the book - *facilitating learning in small groups* – it aims to prepare the teacher with a variety of active learning and questioning techniques, to build student engagement and effectively manage group dynamics. This includes an important section on ground rules, something new colleagues often feel is for the module or programme leader to set - this section dispels this and emphasises the importance of all staff making expectations clear and reinforcing this regularly. Chapter 4 also includes a glossary of active learning strategies, useful for revisiting frequently. The questioning facilitation is another beneficial tool, including ‘top tips for effective questioning’, a list that most new teachers could do with having to hand. This chapter closes with some practical strategies for preventing or de-escalating problems - effective reminders even for those more experienced in the classroom.

Pleasingly, the performance aspect of teaching is discussed in Chapter 5, *teaching large groups and giving lectures*, using a reassuring tone that encourages readers to think about confidence, the management of nerves, body language, voice and breathing, plus using improvisation to respond to unforeseen circumstances (pages 91 – 98). Further scenarios are explored in chapter 6, *supporting students in laboratories and during fieldwork*. The tips and tactics explored would also be useful for a range of subject disciplines, particularly as they suggest constructive ways of managing group dynamics and student engagement in practicals.

Establishing ground rules is discussed further in chapter 7 too, *working with individual students and supervising projects*, as well as the merit of using coaching and mentoring tools when working with individuals or small groups. This would be particularly useful for those involved in career conversations, personal tutoring and/or academic study skills, for example. Active learning is discussed in Chapter 8 but with a particular focus on online learning. This section uses tables and diagrams to aid clarification and reader engagement. This chapter, *using digital technologies in learning and teaching*, also explains the benefits and potential challenges of synchronous and asynchronous learning, plus how technology can be used to

enhance in-person delivery. It includes social media - teaching digital safety, footprint and personal brand, plus how social media might be used as a teaching tool - with the caveat of ensuring any chosen platform is inclusive and accessible.

Chapter 9, *developing inclusive teaching practice*, includes student voice from the start to humanise the experiences of inclusion and discrimination. Reflective prompts ask the reader to consider their own educational experiences and factors that may impact student outcomes. Using Mountford-Zimdars et al. (2015) to structure the discussion emphasises key sector strategies such as belonging, diverse staff recruitment, relational pedagogy, and cultural and social capital. The authors challenge terminology and offer explanations and alternatives too. This chapter uses discussion and scenario provocations to structure the thinking and reflection, as well as further personal examples, covering a range of perspectives and encouraging the reader to value inclusive design.

*Assessing and giving feedback* is the focus of chapter 10, introducing assessment types, marking, moderation, challenges, plus the components of feedback. The slightly longer section on feedback (pages 175 – 184) is worthwhile as it breaks down the principles and emphasises that research indicates that feedback is one of the most important factors contributing to learning (e.g. Hattie, 2009). The authors commend spending time developing students' understanding of marking and feedback, building their feedback literacy which helps to identify misunderstandings or different cultural expectations for example, and instead fosters agency, collaboration and self-evaluation.

Chapters 11 and 12 are about teaching identity and professional development. This end section of the book explores some common challenges new teachers face, with suggested strategies and support mechanisms. Additionally, the authors highlight all colleagues' right to access professional development and wellbeing support, it is not just for students. Confidence, reflection and evaluation are also key themes in this closing section, encouraging readers to consider how they will recognise their own achievements and progression in teaching. Readers are also encouraged to consider

how to articulate this development, whether it's in the form of job applications, research and scholarship, or via a Fellowship (FHEA) application.

Overall, this is a really useful handbook for anyone starting out in teaching in higher education. It is a shame the book no longer maps exactly to the renewed Advance HE Professional Standards Framework, but this does not take away from the solid infrastructure this book provides. It contains educational theory, advice, strategies and personal experiences in a format that makes it easy to pick up and keep on hand throughout the early career period. It's relatable but informative style prevents it from feeling heavy or too theoretical for applying to practice. This book shares, inspires and empowers colleagues to take their first steps into teaching at higher education.