Book Review

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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Liz Thomas describes the field of personal tutoring in Higher Education as "something of an academic desert" (Foreword, p.x) and, with that in mind, the authors have set out to "unearth good practice in tutoring" (p.4). The aims set out in the introduction include providing "a highly effective approach for delivering personal tutoring and coaching" (p.4), acting as a toolkit and having impact on the strategic level, such as the achievement of key performance indicators. Overall I felt that the book achieved its aims and I would agree with Thomas that it is a "much-needed resource" (p.x).

The authors bring a range of experience to their writing, including teaching in different educational sectors, international work, industry experience and working in a variety of roles in a broad range of UK Universities. While no first edition is likely to be completely perfect, nevertheless the four authors, all based at different UK universities, have produced a consistent text with seamless links throughout.

Each chapter is logically structured, including aims, a series of sections with clear headings which address these aims, a summary, a learning checklist and, from chapter two onwards, a Personal Tutor Self-Assessment System. The latter builds up throughout the book, culminating in a self- and institutional-assessment exercise in chapter nine – again, very neat and logical. Each chapter also includes critical thinking activities to engage the reader with the material, case studies and example personal tutor conversations which help to clarify the theory, and tables and diagrams which make the content more accessible. Indeed, Thomas describes the book as "very good distance learning material" (Foreword, p.xi), and not only do I agree, but as a former educational developer I suggest it has much potential to be adapted and used in face-to-face staff development as well.

The authors suggest that the book is primarily aimed at new academic staff, but would be relevant to others such as staff working in student services, experienced academic staff, other student-facing roles and managers of academic staff. I would agree that all these groups would find much of relevance in the book – I soon became oblivious to the references to your role as a new academic. It works well for the cover-to-cover reader and indeed I would recommend that staff who are new to personal tutoring, or who seek to enhance their skills, take the time not only to read the whole book, but also to engage with many of the suggested activities. The clear chapter titles and index would work well for the "dipper", who would find the well-signposted layout easy to navigate.

The book is divided into nine chapters, the first five of which explain the essentials of the personal tutor role. Chapter one introduces contemporary UK Higher Education and defines the responsibilities of the personal tutor within that context, exploring some key concepts including coaching and models of student support. The second chapter identifies the core skills and values of a personal tutor, such as being non-judgemental (value) or building genuine rapport (core skill) and useful examples of them in practice are elaborated. The title of chapter three will be greeted with a sigh of relief by many personal tutors - "Setting boundaries" - and it addresses this topic very effectively, exploring boundaries regarding time, referral, independence and between staff, students and the institution. Chapter four identifies risk factors for students pertaining to home life, student characteristics and cultural/economic factors, suggests tutors should assign each student an "at risk" category and examines strategies to support, track and monitor such students where appropriate. Chapter five focuses on the student lifecycle, transitions and the role of the personal tutor in this context in relation to one-to-ones and group tutoring, including a valuable proposed personal tutoring curriculum.

Chapters six to nine move on from the essentials and elaborate higher level personal tutoring skills. One feature of this book which particularly pleased me was the link established between coaching and personal tutoring, which aligns with the student-centred ethos of contemporary Higher Education rather than the "loco parentis" origins of personal tutoring. This is the particular focus of chapter six, which explains how solution-focused coaching can be used in this context, illustrated with some highly pertinent examples, tools and models. In chapter seven the reader is encouraged to engage with reflective practice regularly, for example writing a journal and talking to a mentor; a number of reflective models are introduced and professional development opportunities are outlined, such as peer observation and personal tutoring networks. Chapter eight addresses measuring the impact of personal tutoring, including the difficult issue of how to measure impact on emotional well-being. While some parts of this chapter could be relevant for early career academics, much of it may be of greater relevance for those who manage personal tutors. The final chapter asks the reader to evaluate their individual and institutional personal tutoring based on all the criteria set out in the book, and to set goals to move towards specific targets within the authors' Personal Tutor Self-Assessment System.

To some extent, it could be argued that this book describes an ideal situation, where all personal tutors have time to work with each tutee individually to set goals and monitor their progress, to reflect critically on their personal tutoring weekly, and to set up regular activities to measure the impact of their interventions. To some early (or indeed later) career academics struggling with the "whirlwind" (p.4) of tasks which face them, this might seem like a distant dream. It is nevertheless a useful dream, and as the (solution focused) authors might say, "what are the next small steps that will start to help you move towards this ideal?"