

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Successful university teaching in times of diversity**

Nicola Rolls, Andrew Northedge & Ellie Chambers (Eds.) 2018

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*Successful university teaching in times of diversity* offers a contemporary, practical and effective introduction to university teaching.

This book, edited by Nicola Rolls, Senior Lecturer at Charles Darwin University (Australia), Andrew Northedge and Ellie Chambers, Emeritus Professors at the Open University (UK), suggests practical tips with solid theoretical foundations aimed at equipping university teachers with transferable skills to enable them to face a multitude of challenges in current diverse university contexts. Throughout the book, there is a strong emphasis on the important underlying role of language and communication for learning and engaging with academic knowledge. Given the clear emphasis on academic language and learning, this book is to be highly recommended to academic language and learning practitioners, not only for their own teaching, but also in their efforts to work collaboratively with subject academics across all disciplines.

The book is divided into five parts and ten chapters, all written by authors with extensive experience in teaching in a wide range of university settings, including both undergraduate and postgraduate students across all disciplines. It is designed to provide a holistic guide to the theory and practice of teaching well at university for new and more experienced practitioners.

Part I, *Teaching in today's universities*, sets the context for university teaching and learning. Chapter 1 (*Learning and learners in modern times*) is an overview of the challenges of teaching in a modern university context. In addition to summarising the historical background of the diversity of student profiles, this chapter also uses research findings and case studies to illustrate how teaching and learning have changed in recent times and how these changes have implications for effective university teaching. The chapter gives examples on how pressure on universities have led to expand, diversify and innovate. These examples are illustrated with case studies about changing student demographics. Factors linked to student dropout or success are well illustrated.

Chapters 2 and 3 (part II, *Principles of learning and teaching*) explore some fundamental educational principles, including the “enhancement of students’ ability to understand and use academic language and to learn successfully through active engagement.” Chapter 2 (*Learning and teaching through language*) introduces academic discourse and the role it plays in creating complex abstract and practical meaning. It differentiates academic discourse from common everyday discourses. It then provides a range of strategies to help students develop a metacognitive awareness to support their learning and suggests ways of integrating these strategies across the curriculum.

Chapter 3 (*Learning and teaching through active engagement*) analyses the complex challenges faced by university teachers in helping students to “make meaning”, the core of successful university learning. The chapter suggests that this is a constructive rather than a passive process. The

chapter offers an excellent range of case studies and practical strategies for both students and teachers.

Part III, *Designing effective learning and teaching* (chapters 4 to 7) focuses on educational strategies which incorporate technology, develop good classroom relationships, and design courses integrating effective assessment schemes. Chapter 4 (*Learning and Teaching in the online era*) explores a range of ways online learning can be integrated in university courses and the challenges this creates. Advantages of online learning are detailed, such as: flexibility of time/place, ease of access to resources, as well as administrative convenience. A range of practical suggestions are made, some aimed at students and some aimed at developing teachers' skills to use online learning. Blended learning, online group discussion, supporting student participation in online learning, and, skills of online teaching are discussed in detail.

Chapter 5 (*Creating a positive environment for learning*) explores the importance of teacher-student and student-student interactions and the importance these interactions have in creating a positive learning environment. Body language as well as spoken interactions are highlighted in creating effective communication in the classroom. Pertinent case studies and numerous practical suggestions are provided. The suggestions and practical examples are of value to ALL educators teaching in mainstream courses as well as to those offering one-off workshops.

Chapter 6 (*Designing assessment to promote learning*) highlights the extent to which assessment plays a fundamental role in student learning. It outlines how students struggle with assignments and suggest strategies to use assessment as a generator of student effort, to make learning happen. The importance of "assessment dialogues" (feedback) is highlighted. Plagiarism, as an essential aspect of this dialogue is discussed. This chapter is particularly relevant to ALL educators providing group and one-to-one assistance or feedback to students on their assignments and assessments.

Chapter 7 (*Designing and presenting a student-friendly course*) puts the previous chapters into practice and provides a step-by-step guide to developing courses which would encourage diverse student cohorts to engage with academic work. The chapter suggests an elaborate process to review policies, consider learning aims, establish learning outcomes, develop assessment strategies and weekly learning activities, then prepare for teaching and review courses in order to improve them.

Part IV, *Inclusive practice for diverse cohorts* (chapters 8 and 9) focuses on language and learning needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Chapter 8 (*Supporting demographic diversity*) explores a range of modes and strategies to support students from a wide range of diverse backgrounds, largely through developing inclusive curricula and learning environments.

Chapter 9 (*Embedding literacy skills in academic teaching*) focuses on strategies to assist university teachers for preparing students to meaningfully engage with texts. The *scaffolding academic literacy* strategies outlined in this chapter are based on theories in learning, language and sociology of education. The chapter provides a teaching/learning model that outlines clear scaffolding steps aimed at preparing students, paragraph by paragraph, and (if necessary) sentence by sentence, for reading, marking texts, and writing from notes. The *scaffolding academic literacy* strategies are designed to be integrated within cognate units of study as part of lectures and tutorials as well as in specific academic language and learning support contexts.

Finally, in part V, *Bringing it all together*, the key educational principles and strategies of the previous chapters are reviewed. Chapter 10 (*Teaching that communicates and inspires*) pulls together the main elements of the nine first chapters to highlight the effectiveness of the various approaches and strategies presented throughout the book.

The book is very accessible to a broad readership: both experienced as well as less experienced and 'new' university teachers. The reason for this is that the book has been purposefully written to include a balance between theoretical discussions, examples of empirical studies and notes on pedagogical applications.

The book could easily be prescribed as a course text in teacher training courses, under and post-graduate degree programs, or used, wholly or in parts in staff development workshops.

I have only minor stylistic criticisms to make about this book. It would have been useful to have some biographical data, not only of the three editors/authors, but of the other six authors who have contributed to many of the chapters. Personally, I found the excessive capitalisation in chapter headings and sub-headings irritating.

Overall, however, this is an excellent book, mainly because it strikes a good balance of theory and practice. This is due to the authors' own experiences in teaching at university with diverse student cohorts and their research track records.

I recommend this book to anyone thriving to improve their teaching.

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