

BOOK REVIEW

Maryellen Weimer (2016), *Essential Teaching Principles: A Resource Collection for Adjunct Faculty*

Madison: Magna Publications, 236 pp., ISBN 9780912150246

Despite the pointed appeal to adjunct faculty in the title, *Essential Teaching Principles: A Resource Collection for Adjunct Faculty* is a useful resource for practitioners and scholars at all levels in the discipline of teaching and learning in higher education. The benefits of the concepts, methods, and viewpoints shared transcend rank and modality. This edited collection will also be of great interest to academic leaders responsible for innovation and improving teaching quality. The book has a utilitarian framework, but scholars of teaching and learning will greatly benefit from the array of topics covered and the references and recommended readings accompanying many contributions.

A notable strength is that the writings rise above mechanical tips about ‘what to do when’ that are found in many scholarly and university teaching resources. The collection is informative and thought provoking in exploring contemporary and well-known issues, but stops short of becoming either prescriptive or vulnerable to obsolescence in rapidly changing teaching and learning environments. The high-level perspectives of the readings increase the shelf life of the recommendations and provide best practices broad enough to inspire reflection in all faculty. *Essential Teaching Principles* was composed in a manner that allows for continued relevance in a world of ever-changing course delivery methods, teaching technologies and student populations.

The volume has more than seventy contributions organised into eight chapters spanning effective instruction, course design, student learning, learning environments, online teaching, learning assessment methods, grading and receiving feedback as a teacher. For the purposes of this review, the chapters were condensed into three broader topic areas: instruction and course design, student learning and feedback for students and faculty. To provide overall context for the work and illustrate the quality of contributions,



a general overview of topics covered and exemplary writings from each of the eight chapters will be examined.

The foreword provides a typology of faculty rank and an insightful review of challenges adjunct instructors face while playing peripheral roles in the academy. The foreword is resourceful and well-written, but disconnected from the author's introduction, the included writings and the general spirit the book takes on as one reads the contributions. The foreword mentions the book 'targets the unique needs of adjunct instructors' (9), which is true, but greatly undersells the breadth of the collection and its applicability as a resource for faculty at any level. As a former chair and associate college dean, I can attest the scope of the collection far exceeds the needs of part-time instructors and would do much to improve the teaching of full-time faculty, especially those whose perspectives and methods have not evolved with the changing landscape of higher education. The reference to adjunct instructors is rarely seen in the collection, which allows the book to take on the wider scope it deserves. Readers discarding this resource because of the scope implied by the foreword and title are doing so at their own peril, as the collection is of great benefit to all who want to excel in higher education teaching.

The overarching topic of instruction and design is thoroughly explored in several chapters. The contributions examine faculty motivation and identity, course organisation, content relevance, teaching online and assessment and grading practices. For example, Daniel Kilonsky's contribution 'Why Don't We Teach the Telephone Book' critically examines the inclusion of course content when arguing 'many . . . courses cover information that most students may never need to know'. The author describes that although the telephone book contains valid information, it is not taught for obvious reasons concerning applicability and argues the same critical eye should be used to examine less obviously unneeded information taught simply 'because we know it' (39). When examining the benefits of course redesign, Peter Armbruster, Maya Patel, Erika Johnson, and Martha Weiss discuss findings that indicate improvement in student attitudes, performance and participation, and even increased morale and enthusiasm on the part of the instructor. More than just a summary of findings, the authors include details allowing replicability in any setting. The contributions begin to focus on online environments with Oliver Dreon's study of faculty members' social presence in online courses. The author posits that those teaching online often focus on teaching presence and cognitive presence in developing and delivering courses,



and provides implementable techniques to foster faculty social presence. In the final chapter covering instruction and design, Phillip Johnson takes on academic dishonesty in a way the disciplines may find challenging: he implies that faculty are *at least* part of the problem. In a thought-provoking statement, Johnson provides 'Cheating is an issue only in relation to grading, not learning'. He argues that thoughtful course design can diminish cheating by downplaying grades, creating less adversarial relationships and promoting learning above academic performance. This inward look contrasts with many current conversations centring on plagiarism-checking technology and cultural issues, and adds a new perspective to prolific cheating.

The second general area of examination in the book consists of two chapters that fit into the field of student learning. These chapters explore topics such as student preparation, motivators and detractors from learning, and the benefits of group work and learning-centred climates. In taking on a ubiquitous challenge in teaching, Lydia Burak's empirical study on technology multitasking in the classroom, such as text messaging and checking social media pages, found a significant negative relationship between such multitasking in class and grades achieved. Although somewhat confirmatory to faculty active in the classroom, the findings of the report concerning students' knowledge of the effects of multitasking and multitasking's correlation with other high-risk behaviours is alarming. In a similar direction, Patricia Kohler-Evans and Candice Barnes' contribution explores how distracted professors can focus on being 'present' for students. The authors argue that faculty too are distracted, and that preoccupation may be affecting the classroom climate and detracting from engagement and learning.

The final general topic area examines feedback for students and faculty. The chapters focus on important feedback mechanisms for both parties such as student peer review, assignment rubrics, grading policy and student reviews. The work of Mary Lynn Henningsen, Kathleen Valde, Gregory A. Russell, and Gregory R. Russell exploring the dynamic of conversations in which students challenge grades is summarised and guidance on how to turn these difficult conversations into productive learning experiences is provided. The authors note how emotionally charged these conversations can be and admit they are often unpleasant for faculty and students. The authors argue, however, that with proper guidance the student can be treated respectfully, can feel their voice was heard and can learn from the experience. In an equally contentious topic, the final chapter in the book takes on the subject of negative student reviews. For example, the work of Linda

Hodges and Katherine Stanton provides examples of negative student comments and illustrations of how faculty can look inward to improve. The article leaves room for debate, but provides a primer for faculty interpreting specific student comments.

Overall, the book is as an excellent resource and it serves a very practical purpose as it is instructive in nature, but rich with empirical research, references and Weimer's recommended readings. The book is bold in taking on controversial but important concepts in teaching but does so in a productive manner that allows for interpretation and debate while providing implementable interventions for many of faculty's toughest challenges.

Thomas J. Eveland
Ohio Dominican University
evelandt@ohiodominican.edu