

Review of Hughes, K. (2017). *Encouraging Diversity in Higher Education: Supporting student success*. New York: Routledge.*

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Kate Hughes, President of the Australian Sociological Association (TASA) and a consultant in higher education provides a practical guide to a proven range of transparent pedagogies against the backdrop of the massification of higher education in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia and New Zealand. Written with great clarity and enthusiasm, it provides a context within which to consider the nature of teaching and learning, and in particular, the importance of what happens in the classroom.

Having outlined the drivers for widening participation in higher education, Hughes describes how each of the countries studied “engaged in large scale attempts to give access to higher education to people from non-university going backgrounds who ordinarily would neither have aspired to go nor had the entrance qualifications”. Universities across the league table have endeavoured to enrol greater numbers of diverse students, seen as a way to increase social mobility and social inclusion. The resultant government policies have had varying success in terms of the level of diversity achieved. The author is keen to point out that this development is happening in a context of neoliberalist thinking and is quick to argue that teaching is the least acknowledged part of the academics’ workload – research often taking pride of place, and that “good teaching is largely perceived as being of secondary importance in higher education”.

Pointing to a gap in the literature on classroom pragmatics and the idea that education should be transformative, leads to an obvious focus on how teaching and learning actually happens. Much of the book is devoted to detailing the nature and use of “transparent pedagogies” in the

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“transformative space” that is the classroom. After all, the aim is not just to increase the number of students from non-traditional backgrounds in university, but to ensure they are successful – in other words, that they graduate, and that they become critical thinkers. Students are changed through *what* they learn but also *how* they learn.

While government policies have been geared towards widening participation, successfully dealing with increased numbers from diverse backgrounds in higher education relies primarily on the teaching methodologies employed. While, as Hughes points out, the implementation of policies on massification further fuels the debate on issues such as university league tables, academics’ teaching/research balance, and the increased workload for teachers, here she addresses the fact that accepting non-traditional students presents complex challenges in the classroom. Transparent pedagogies are presented as the way to encourage diversity in higher education – and to help ensure its success, not just in terms of enrolment, but in terms of completion of undergraduate degrees.

A two year project based in two Australian universities at the lowest end of the league tables, where 167 teachers were taught the nature and value of transparent pedagogies, provides narratives that support the link between teaching methods and student success. Participants repeatedly described classroom cultures where students are highly engaged. A critical aspect of this approach is the move from *connaissance* to *savoir* as a basis for pedagogical work i.e. increased attention on the ways in which understanding is forged in the dialogic classroom.

Having provided the rationale for transparent pedagogies and a step by step guide to using them, the teaching and learning begins with exercises designed to build connections – between teacher and students, but also between students. Exercises range from name learning to building personal bonds and each take about 5 to 10 minutes. The planned purposeful use of humour and games in these activities helps build a dialogic classroom where learning can take place largely because students can feel safe. For non-traditional students in particular, they can begin to learn the skills, qualities and understanding needed throughout their university life and in the workforce.

Having developed a degree of social capital and self-confidence, the next stage is the use of collaborative teaching methods to help build academic literacies. For students from a non-traditional background, the culture of a university can be confusing, so teachers must work to make the implicit explicit. For this, a further range of exercises are provided, to be introduced on an incremental level, culminating in the development of critical thinking. Experienced teachers will be familiar with and may already use many of the techniques and exercises provided (Chapters 3, 4 & 5). All students have to learn the discipline knowledge, but students

from diverse backgrounds also need particular teaching in the protocols useful to pre reading, working with text, critical analysis and developing oral fluency. Designed to be used in a scaffolding method, these exercises or strategies include specific ways to teach students how to read critically and effectively, build discipline vocabulary, write successfully to academic prompts, deliver oral presentations well and understand visual material. Incremental exposure to these is both a means of covering the class material and of furnishing students with tools for developing critical academic skills.

The pedagogies promoted throughout this book rely on collaborative teaching, which is a proven method of generating the type of student engagement critical to success in university. It is by no means a new approach in education, and as Hughes acknowledges a range of collaborative teaching methods are increasingly being used in higher education in the four countries studied.

The key message of this book is that collaborative teaching methods and transparent pedagogies must be taught explicitly in higher education particularly for the benefit of students from diverse backgrounds. Fostering their ability to think critically and to work collaboratively is central to their success at university and in their careers as graduates. This book provides interesting reading to all those involved in or interested in education in general, and teaching methodologies in particular. One would imagine that many teachers would report that they increasingly find themselves in teaching situations where they are called upon to make the implicit explicit, and already employ these techniques in the classroom. The onus is now on the governments and universities to help embed collaborative teaching methodologies in the classroom.

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