

EFFECTIVE PERSONAL TUTORING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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This new text is a welcome addition to discourses around the role of the personal tutor, and the value that a skilled tutor can add to the student experience through effective support, coaching and mentoring within a higher education setting. The growing interest in the role played by personal tutors across all levels of education reflects the move towards more student-centred forms of learning, with institutions increasingly taking a more holistic approach to supporting learners through all aspects of their educational experience (see, for example, McIntosh (2016), drawing upon Kift's (2015) 'whole of institution' approach). The role of a personal tutor is not easily defined, however, with the authors acknowledging that the term is likely to cover 'all activities where academic or professional staff work in partnership with students to provide one-to-one support, advice and guidance, of either an academic or pastoral nature' (p. 2).

The authors have all written on the responsibilities inherent in this role before; indeed, this new book adopts the same format and structure as Stork & Walker's (2015) text on personal tutoring in a further education context. Their co-authors are equally well placed to discuss the importance of the tutor role: Lochtie is chair of the Professional Development Committee for UK Advising and Tutoring (UKAT), and McIntosh has written widely about the student lifecycle and how best to support individuals through the transitions that form part and parcel of that journey. The authors' wealth of hands-on experience is reflected in the practical nature of the book: it is easy to dip into, and examples and case studies are closely linked to concrete situations a personal tutor is likely to encounter in their daily practice. As the authors point out, for the new or pre-service teacher, 'personal

tutoring, coaching and student-centred pedagogy are areas that are implicit within your qualification' (p. 7), and yet the considerable range of skills needed by a personal tutor are unlikely to have been covered in any depth during the course itself. According to the second chapter of the book, these core skills can be divided into domain-general and domain-specific, and then further subdivided into 'hard' and 'soft' skills; an example of a 'hard' skill might be effective curriculum planning, whilst building rapport with students would be considered 'soft'. The book pays more attention to the development of these 'soft' skills, a reasonable focus in view of the fact these skills are considered harder to teach and must be developed throughout one's career rather than neatly delivered during a teaching qualification.

The book presents nine chapters in all, covering key aspects of the tutoring role. The first two chapters attempt to establish what is meant by the term 'personal tutor' and the core skills and values needed to succeed in such a role, with chapter 3 (setting boundaries), chapter 4 (identifying student populations, such as those at risk), chapter 5 (supporting learners at all stages of their student lifecycle) and chapter 6 (use of solution-focused coaching to support students) all focusing on different elements of classroom practice. The final three chapters then encourage readers to adopt a reflective approach to developing their practice, understand how to measure the impact of their role, and consider some next steps both for themselves and their institution. Each of these chapters follows a similar format, setting clear learning objectives before exploring the chapter's topic first from a theoretical perspective and then through 'critical thinking activities' designed to help the reader

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apply theory to their own practice.

On the whole, this is an effective structure. The text uses case studies to illustrate the kinds of conversations that may take place with students, followed by discussion of the strengths and weaknesses displayed by the tutor in each scenario. Each chapter finishes with a brief summary, a learning checklist, a list of critical reflections for the reader to consider with regard to their own practice, and a helpful list of references for further reading. This approach makes the book highly user-friendly, although sometimes the reader may feel that items on learning checklists such as 'I understand that in order for the learning from the book to become embedded, I need to take ownership' (chapter 9, p. 216) push the point too far. However, the thorough consideration of underpinning ideas and theories means this this new volume will be of use to even the most experienced of tutors. Whilst the book is not explicitly aimed at teacher educators, this is a valuable text for those for whom tutoring responsibilities are twofold: not only must teacher educators fulfil their own responsibilities in providing support and guidance, they must also ensure pre-service teachers are developing the skills they need in their future careers. ■

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