



Learning, Teaching and Assessment in Higher Education: Global Perspectives

Brown, Sally
Palgrave Macmillan Springer Nature, 2015

Book Review

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This global study of teaching, learning, and assessment goes beyond the typical single country context to extend to good pedagogical practice on six continents. The argument of each chapter is supported by examples of good practice accounts from around the world, a collection that forms a refreshing change from a generic case study model. Although the examples lean most heavily toward English-speaking institutions and classrooms, there is significant attention paid to various elements of pedagogy from many cultural perspectives. The author takes great care throughout the book to consider all elements of the changing higher education landscape, including the changing student body, changes in technology, and changes in expectations about the goals of higher education and graduate employability.

The twelve chapters of this book take a comprehensive view of diversity in higher education teaching, learning, and assessment. The book opens with a consideration of cultural mores and assumptions that directly affect interactions in higher education. Brown looks both to the past and the future in subsequent chapters, noting pedagogical traditions and innovations in the context of today's higher education landscape. She argues that we must adjust to a technology-rich world that necessitates more focus on "learning how and learning why than on learning what" (21). Her view of technology in the balance as both a distraction and a valuable addition to certain aspects of both teaching and learning is refreshing, as so many books either glorify or decry technology in classrooms and society. This ability to see things in the balance is one of the greatest strengths of this book: rather than arguing for a "best" way to teaching or learning or assessment, this book offers multiple possibilities from multiple contexts and thus leaves much to the reader to judge based on his or her context and constraints.

Brown identifies a few global trends. The most widespread seems to be a move from transmissive to transformative education. She notes that there is a “movement from perceiving the university teacher as an all-knowing, unchallengeable authority figure” (27) and parallel a movement by institutions and disciplines toward encouraging learning outside of the lecture hall. Another trend is teaching toward the multiple literacies expected of a twenty-first century graduate, looking well beyond academic literacy to digital, assessment, and interpersonal literacies (88). Finally, Brown notes that all education needs to think of itself as taking place in a global environment. This book is itself a fine way to encourage broader thinking about pedagogical contexts in higher education: our students are shortchanged when we privilege our own pedagogical traditions and ignore the broader, global context of higher education.

The strengths of this book are many. For instance, the author provides substantive and exhaustive bulleted lists in each chapter, a diverse set of highlighted good practice accounts, and a full chapter devoted to higher education teacher development. The book is easy to navigate, written in clear prose, and at once expansive but grounded in particulars. I would recommend this book highly to teachers and administrators in higher education across the disciplines.

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