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Book Reviews, Spring 1979

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Book Reviews

Bligh, Donald, et al. *Teaching Students*. Exeter University Teaching Services, Streatham Court, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4PU England, 1975.

This book was published in 1975, and I was so impressed by it at that time that I wrote a review for the Society for Research in Higher Education (London) in which I said the following:

Among the plethora of teaching/learning oriented books which have emerged in the wake of the faculty/professional development mania, this work stands far above the others. Not since McKeachie's *Teaching Tips* has such a worthwhile book on the topic appeared.

At the risk of losing some of my good friends in "the movement," I find that today I still stand by those statements. The only thing I cannot figure out is why more people in the United States have not discovered this book. It has been roundly praised in several countries, but I have yet to encounter any professional development people here who know of it.

I find Bligh to be more global and yet more incisive than many of his counterparts on this side of the Atlantic, mostly due to the fact that he has conducted courses for teachers in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America for many years. These years of varied experience have served to moderate the pedantry which has surfaced in the writings of some of the new and true believers who have much narrower experiences.

The book focuses on seven major areas a teacher must/should consider when planning a course: objectives, student assessment, selecting students (don't we wish!), course sequencing, teaching methods, analytical models of course design, and the diagnosis and treatment of course defects. What impresses me to a great degree is that these topics, about which we all think we know, are discussed

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for a faculty audience—not a professional development staff audience. And you know what? All those things we pretend to know but really don't understand can be learned from this book.

You may also wish to know how important my recommendation is that you read this book. I can only recount a recent (and true) story: When Steve Scholl emerged from the Core Committee session at the last POD conference (a session at which he led us in the final synthesis of the Delphi-generated goals for the organization), Fred Gaige asked him how it went. "It must have gone well," Steve said. "Glenn Nyre said he liked it and he doesn't like anything!"

GLENN F. NYRE

Milton, Ohmer (Ed.). On College Teaching. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1978.

On College Teaching is a collection of essays written by "experienced teachers to their colleagues about their mutual craft" for the purpose of answering the question: "What contributions can we as teachers make to our students' learning?" In each essay, the author discusses a particular approach to college teaching through reference to research findings and personal experience. Topics covered include general instructional practices such as writing objectives, testing, lecturing, and leading discussions, as well as descriptions of eight classroom approaches designed to actively involve students, comments on "older students," a review of research on the evaluation of teaching, and suggestions for further reading. The theme of the book is that the college teacher needs to enlarge his or her vision of the teaching role and to experiment with a broad range of teaching approaches.

Although the quality of the book varies from author to author, by selecting the best written, most succinct and complete chapters, the reader should be assisted in designing, implementing, or improving the instructional practice under consideration. One chapter in particular stands out from the rest for its clarity of expression and provocative insights. Patricia W. Barnes-McConnell argues that successful discussions are the outcome of extensive preparation involving not only the acquisition of content knowledge and specific

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discussion skills, but also the development of a sensitivity to student needs and interactions. A large portion of the chapter is devoted to the latter—the development of instructor attitudes of openness, mutual inquiry, and trust. Perceptive awareness of student characistics, of the needs of special groups, and of the sensitive nature of course materials demands diligent work on the part of the instructor seriously interested in promoting classroom discussion.

Particularly good in delimiting the complexities of competency-based learning is Woditsch's chapter. The author argues that those skills which underlie successful performance in all aspects of life, e.g., selective attention, sustained analysis, the use of analogies, can be taught throughout the college curriculum by faculty who perceive new instructional roles for themselves and their students. "Using the Personalized System of Instruction" is another of those chapters worth reading or recommending. The authors provide a brief history of PSI, describe the essential features of the system, consider changes demanded of instructors and students, and suggest guidelines for designing, running, and "fine-tuning" a PSI course.

Three chapters provide excellent resources for institutional planning and in-depth study. Rochler cites a number of benefits for student learning associated with simulation and gaming and provides an annotated list of simple but effective simulations. Duley details the steps in planning and implementing field experiences in Chapter Twelve. Finally, Milton reviews research related to the impact of testing on learning before offering guidelines for improved test construction.

Unfortunately, all of the chapters do not develop their topics in such clear and comprehensive ways. In particular, Chapter Three on "Lecturing" may deter the avid reader from continuing. Satterfield's limited view of lecturing as oral, written discourse, his use of excessively complex sentence structures and obtuse language obscure his suggestions for improving the content, delivery, and form of lectures. Three additional instructional procedures—the use of computers, contracting, and case studies—are not clearly described or linked to classroom teaching. One final chapter is disappointing for what it omits. Stern describes the "older students" without reference to the growing body of research on adult development and learning. Neither does he address specific implications for teaching such students.

In summary, On College Teaching will provide few new insights for the professional development specialist. However, a number of the chapters may serve as excellent resources for those teachers considering the improvement or development of specific instructional approaches.

LUANN WILKERSON

Seligman, Martin E. P. Helplessness: On Development, Depression, and Death. W.H. Freeman and Company, San Francisco, 1975, \$4.95 (paperback).

Why review a 1975 monograph in psychology? Surely, we ought to keep abreast of a field which is the source of so much of what we apply. My experience is that very few members of POD know about Seligman's work. His book is seminal, something his colleagues suspected when they awarded him the American Psychological Association's citation as Outstanding Young Psychologist of 1976.

Moreover, a book about how people learn to be helpless is right up our alley if the empowerment of people (call it what you will—self-actualization, self-management, mastery, growth) is something we are about. Not only is the book a model of what immensely readable academic prose can be, but Seligman does something few psychologists manage: he integrates the humanist spirit and the behaviorist's methodology to produce a paradigm that has tremendous generative power.

The thesis of *Helplessness* is direct: individual members of most species (and of *homo sapiens* above all) search actively for causal relationships between their voluntary actions and valuable outcomes in the world. If a person perceives synchrony between her responses and outcomes, she "learns" a sense of mastery which leads to high ego strength, strong motivation, cognitive growth, positive affect. If he perceives asynchrony, he learns a sense of helplessness which leads to low ego strength, depression in its many behavioral guises, disrupted cognition and development, negative affect, even death. Equally important, people learn "discriminative helplessness," that is, helplessness with respect to a given set of conditions (the class-

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room opposed to the gym, teaching students as opposed to conducting experiments, English as opposed to mathematics). Seligman's conclusions are based on a series of elegant triadic experiments (involving "yoked," "unyoked," and naive groups) and on strongly analogous first-hand experiences in clinical and educational settings.

At the risk of embarrassing the scrupulous scientist in Seligman, let me use the paradigm to suggest that developers encounter learned helplessness nearly every day in our work. The challenge is to discern what the "set" is in which people feel helpless and to assist them to figure out ways to develop mastery whether the client is a student seeking to learn history, an instructor trying out a teaching experiment, or the administrator trying to improve the conditions for teaching. Seligman is a most resourceful ally. If one wish were available, I'd have every member of an institution read this book and consider ways each contributes to setting up situations where others experience helplessness.

LANCE C. BUHL, Ph. D.

PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT

POD'S FIFTH ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE

October 28–31, Glennstone Lodge, Gatlinburg, Tennessee in the Smokey Mountains

Time for renewal: Meet old friends — make new friends.

Preliminary theme: How can POD meet the needs of the 1980's?

Contact: Earle Bowen (conference chair), Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University of Tennessee CHS, 8 South Dunlap Street, Rm. BB8, Memphis, TN 38163. (901) 528-5578.