

*Meaningful Teaching Interaction at the Internationalised University: moving from research to impact.*

DORIS DIPPOLD and MARION HERON (Editors) 2021. Abingdon, Routledge, 209 pp,

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It is my experience that many discussions between colleagues about teaching centre on the issues of student engagement and the lack of participation in classroom activities. This book, edited by Dippold and Heron (University of Surrey) may help educators develop more understanding about these issues. It is a collection of chapters examining why educators aim to stimulate interaction in the classroom and offering some ideas about how to go about encouraging that interaction to take place. However, it is not an instructional how to do it book; instead, there is some educational theory, a critique of some of the assumptions around dialogic teaching and classroom interaction, together with reflective pieces about attempts to stimulate interactivity.

In Part 1, on educational theory, Chapter 3 explains dialogic teaching, where a class and teacher work together to construct understanding, suggesting that dialogic teaching is perhaps better understood in school rather than higher education contexts. I felt that Chapter 4 was the most challenging in the collection. In it, Lee-Ann Sequeira considers: “The problem with silent students” (p. 39). She suggests that quiet students are often viewed as problematic and silent students as deficient. She worries that these students are “pathologised” and urged to seek help and/or counselling. She also worries that educators are biased toward participative students, just as students, in module evaluations, tend to rate sociable fun learning over effective learning. The chapter goes on to challenge orthodox thinking on interaction, for example, noting the significant asymmetries of power and influence in the classroom that impact on silent students. She also makes the point that in many educational contexts, silence is valued (for example in the lecture theatre or exam). Therefore she suggests educators need to be more explicit about what they expect of their students, that they need to promote active listening, respect and empathy and make

sure that learning is the outcome rather than just creating noise and interaction. In a *mea culpa* at the end of the chapter, she suggests that educational instructors, like herself, might have in the past unwittingly put too much emphasis on interaction at the expense of learning.

The second part of the book includes chapters set in different disciplinary contexts. Chapter 10 echoes some of the silent student issues (covered in Chapter 4) in a study of the behaviours of international postgraduate masters students at Southampton. It suggests that the students surveyed preferred not talking to each other. Instead, they communicated via asynchronous online chats and, in their view, spent more time working on the project and less time talking about it (compared to their first language colleagues). Chapter 7 refers to an initiative to develop an interactive skills module in a hyper-diverse Canadian Business School cohort. Using ethnographic methods the researchers witness the subversion of the ideals of the module by participating students, leading to the marginalisation of the second language students in the run-up to the module assessment. They conclude that despite the best of intentions, the module design was flawed because of the emphasis placed on a presentation, which was too intimidating for those working in a second language, and the choice of a case study that foregrounded the knowledge of home students over their international colleagues.

The final section of the book on classroom interventions is somewhat disappointing in that several of the interventions referred to took place in school settings, and another in the distinctive setting of a drama department, rather than a more typical higher education setting. Perhaps most useful in this final part is Chapter 14, which is an interesting account of a review of the cultural assumptions made by teaching staff in the wake of a student bullying incident. It makes the point that: "[...] classroom interaction is central to students' experience of Higher Education, and it is argued that when it is managed effectively by self-aware teachers who appreciate and value diversity it can help safeguard students in ways which extend beyond the classroom" (p. 180).

Throughout the book, the reader is aware of a very large elephant in the room. The book is about classroom interaction in internationalised universities and was published in 2021. Whilst there are a few remarks about the impact on the Covid-19 on higher education at the beginning and end of the book, all the research referred to and all the classroom activities discussed took place prior to 2020 and crucially before the global pandemic put a stop to international face to face higher education as we knew it. Perhaps by the start of 2022-2023, global higher education will be back to where it was in 2019. If it is, this book will become relevant again. If, on the other hand, we are past the peak of international higher education and instead are at the start of a significant shift to online transnational higher education, then it will have some, but much probably much less relevance in that new context.

[816 words]

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