

## Introduction

### Who is this book for?

This book is primarily aimed at postgraduate students who are just beginning to teach. So, you may be one of those students studying for a masters degree or a doctorate. These are the students we refer to throughout the book as 'postgraduates'. In some institutions, perhaps your own, postgraduates who teach may be called postgraduate teaching assistants (PGAs), demonstrators or some other title; to minimise confusion we have avoided these titles. We think this book will also be useful for postdoctoral students, contract researchers, teaching fellows or instructors and research staff – in short, for anyone whose main activity is research but who does some teaching at the same time.

If you have been asked to do some teaching, you may feel you have been 'thrown in at the deep end', as, in fact, many postgraduates tell us they are. You may, quite rightly, feel unprepared for the task, and, like other postgraduate teachers, you may be facing a number of dilemmas. For example, you may not have much time to feel your way into this new role. You may not be happy with what looks like a 'trial and error' model of learning to teach. You may even feel you have not had much choice in what you are to teach or what kinds of sessions you've been asked to facilitate.

Someone in your department may have tried to reassure you – 'You know all this stuff. You'll be fine' – on the basis of your first degree, but you may still be worried about whether or not you are really ready to teach.

We hope this book will support postgraduates in all disciplines, and for that reason we have kept its language generic. In acknowledgement of the sciences, we have included a chapter on teaching laboratories and fieldwork. For postgraduates who are engaged in highly experiential activities, such as conservatoire teaching in the arts, much of this book will be applicable.

### Do you know what you are getting into?

Before you accept your first teaching task, consider the implications carefully. Yes, it is excellent for your professional development and for the curriculum vitae,

especially if you intend to pursue an academic career, but teaching takes up time, in preparation, delivery and, frequently, marking. How much time can you afford at this stage of your research? How often will you need to be 'out', collecting data? How much data analysis will you need to do and how long is that likely to take? How much writing have you managed to do already and how much do you still have to do? When are the 'pressure points' for teaching and assessment, and how do they intercalate with your research schedule? How much 'new' work will you need to do in order to teach the topic(s)? Will you have to devise lectures and/or activities for group learning, laboratory work and individual study, or has all that already been done? What is the nature and volume of the assessments you may have to mark? See if you can get answers to at least some of these questions.

You may or may not have much room for negotiation about whether or not to teach, since some institutions require postgraduates to 'do a little teaching'. However, having thought through the answers to some of the questions we pose above, you should be better placed to set boundaries on what you do, and to position that work in the context of your research project. For example, we would suggest that you should draw the line at curriculum design and development, which really should not be your responsibility. These tasks should be handled by academic staff, since they require formal training and/or mentoring and discussion with department colleagues. In your discussions with staff about your teaching, you may be pressurised to do more than is fair or more than you want to do. Remember, however, that the priority, for both you and your research supervisors, is for you to complete your research on time.

To clarify, the accompanying table sets out responsibilities that are typical of most postgraduate teachers and could serve as a useful guide against which to benchmark your own commitments. You can see from this table that your primary roles may include the facilitation, support and/or assessment of students' learning. How much autonomy you will have in these roles will depend on your department and the institution. You may be asked to use pre-prepared PowerPoint slides for lectures and 'off the shelf' teaching materials for tutorials, or, in contrast, you may be given lots of freedom to 'do your own thing' as long as you cover the syllabus.

Regardless of the level of autonomy, it is your responsibility to help students learn as best you can. In order to do this well, you need to understand some of the theory and research on adult learning. You will need to know how programmes or courses run, how they relate to aims and objectives or learning outcomes, and where your particular teaching sits in the bigger picture of the whole curriculum. It is not enough to see one session or class in isolation and

## Typical responsibilities of postgraduate teachers

WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY	WHAT IS NOT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY
Know and use key research and theories on adult learning	Read every paper on the topic
Understand the programme/module aims and objectives/outcomes	Design the curricula
Stay on track with the syllabus	Write/rewrite the syllabus
Plan and prepare for your teaching	Take responsibility for them
Facilitate students' learning	Design the assessments
Help students prepare for assessments	
Provide information about assessments and criteria	
Assess fairly and give constructive feedback	
Return assessments promptly	
Comply with regulations and procedures for managing assessments and marks	Manage procedures for assessments and marking
Practise with due regard to the principles of and legislation on equal opportunities, race relations and disabilities	

plan to teach it as a discrete event. Above all, it is crucial that the learning and teaching activities you decide to use are linked to academic outcomes and assessments.

One area to which you should pay particular attention relates to the issues of equal opportunities, race relations and disabilities. In many countries now, there is legislation preventing discrimination on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability and/or status, and you should know what the law requires in your country. You can, and should, find out more about these laws by asking your institution's policy unit or human resources department or by searching your government's website. However, regardless of the law, we strongly believe it is the responsibility of all educators to engage in practice which is inclusive and equitable. There is more discussion about these issues in Chapter 7 of this book which we encourage you to read. Other good places to start for information and pragmatic suggestions are *Accessible Curricula: Good Practice for All* (Doyle and Robson, 2002) (also available at the University of Wales Institute website <http://www.uwic.ac.uk/ltsu/accessible.html>) and the Teachability Project website of the University of Strathclyde (<http://www.teachability.strath.ac.uk/>).

## Equal opportunities and inclusivity

It is your responsibility to be inclusive in your teaching, and there should be people in your institution whose responsibility it is to help you do this. They are the experts. You may find them in your university's student services department.

Things are moving so fast in this area, and are being applied differently in different universities, that we advise you to check this area for yourself. It is not that you should learn up all the law, but that you should learn about how it is being applied in your department.

Think about how you will ensure that you meet your institution's requirements in each of the forms of teaching covered in this book or, at least, in the form(s) of teaching you are required to do.

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## What do postgraduates say they need?

In this book, the topics covered and the weighting given to each topic were influenced by discussions and workshops with postgraduates. We have considered and responded to their concerns and explicitly included their questions and reactions throughout. The overwhelming message they give us, initially, is how much they want to learn about strategies, approaches, ideas and techniques they can use for planning and facilitating learning. The following quotes represent the most frequent responses when we asked postgraduates in 2001–5 what they would like our courses to cover:

**Presentation style, facilitating discussions and asking questions to get answers.**

**How to select the most appropriate teaching method.**

**Preparing and structuring lessons, managing groups, feedback to students.**

**Managing tutorials, lecturing, assessment.**

## **Demonstrating in practicals.**

### **How to deal with situations when things go wrong.**

After they engage in our courses and workshops, postgraduates say how useful that practical information has been, but they also say how much their thinking about learning has been changed by discussions based on research and theory. Some also appreciate that it is important to be aware of the wider issues in academic life, such as institutional regulations and procedures and national policies and codes of practice.

Lastly, but not least, some postgraduates express concern about how they will juggle teaching and research, especially if they think they will have to 'read up' on the subject(s) they have been asked to teach. This can, of course, be a very real problem, and one that we have tried to address throughout.

This is one of the risks we alert you to in what we call our 'health warnings'. They appear distinctly in boxes to warn you to think carefully about, for example, whether you are in danger of taking on too much or of straying, with the best of intentions, beyond your remit. We included these because postgraduates tell us that there are risks that they wish they had known about earlier, such as when, looking back, they know that they spent far too long preparing their first lesson. This may have been because they had no clear system of preparing and no criteria for judging what they were doing – a recipe for overinvestment of time and energy. What you do about these issues is, of course, for you to judge. Finding the balance between teaching and research, in your time management, is not easy, but we make suggestions throughout about when you need to pause and think through what you are doing, or even if you should be doing it.

## **What is this book about?**

The first experience of teaching can be very stressful and even good, experienced teachers say they still feel nervous and anxious the first time they meet a new class. However, these experienced teachers also say their nervousness soon disappears; this is because they have skills and strategies, underpinned by an understanding of theory, for quickly establishing rapport and focusing on the learning and teaching.

With that in mind, this book offers a balance of theoretical and practical information to help you prepare for, practise and develop your teaching. It is intended to be used by those who have to survive primarily on their own devices, but it can also be a supplement to local training, mentoring and other forms of

support. It is based on the premise that, ultimately, it is your responsibility to develop your understanding and practice of learning and teaching.

In order to do that, you have not only to develop practical skills but also to begin to grasp some of the principles of teaching and learning in higher education and to know something about the research. In this book we have worked hard not to submerge you in educational theory; instead, we provide key concepts and practical approaches for you to use. We do this by giving you:

- summaries of basic theories and models;
- explanations of different aspects of teaching;
- examples of good practice;
- frameworks you can use to design materials and classes;
- guidance and suggestions to help you facilitate learning;
- sources and resources for additional help;
- prompts for clarifying your role and working out your responsibilities;
- a framework for building your reflective teaching portfolio.

The aim, therefore, is not just for you to 'survive' the first teaching assignment, but for you to learn and develop in the course of that first experience. This comment from one of our postgraduates (2002) expresses her appreciation of that concept:

**I've learned that teaching is a constantly changing process and involves a lot of reflection to become adept and a good teacher.**

In fact, your first experience of teaching is the start of your development as a teacher, the point at which you begin to work out what you must or want to learn about teaching and learning. Documenting that first experience is therefore an important part of your development, and where you document it is in your teaching portfolio. Since many postgraduates tell us they do not know what this means, and since it is one way in which you can demonstrate that you have taken a professional approach to your teaching, we begin by defining it here and suggest ways in which you can build your portfolio at the end of each chapter.

## Setting up your teaching portfolio

**The portfolio is to teaching what lists of publications, grants and honors are to research and scholarship. (Seldin, 1997)**

This is one definition of a teaching portfolio which describes it as both a collection of work and evidence of work. There is now a considerable amount of literature on teaching portfolios, but there is debate about what a portfolio is and how you compile one.

However, because you are about to embark on another learning journey, that is learning about learning, teaching and assessment, our view of a teaching portfolio is that it must include a critical and reflective appraisal of your own practice supported by the evidence of that practice. In other words, putting student evaluation forms or copies of articles about teaching into a shoebox or folder is not enough. What is important is that you:

- think in advance about what you want to know and plan how you will collect evidence;
- collect the evidence;
- critically reflect on the evidence to see what your students are learning and how you are teaching;
- decide what you will do next and plan for future action.

You will have many opportunities to accumulate piles of paper and other types of evidence, such as videos, but our suggestion is that you should be deliberate and selective about what you choose. Furthermore, your choices will change as you move through your career.

The reflective portfolio is an excellent way to track your own learning and plan your professional development (Moon, 1999; 2004). However, it may also prove to be a useful document in applying for jobs, promotions, memberships of professional bodies and honorary recognition. Already, a number of professional bodies require teaching portfolios to maintain membership, and many institutions require membership of the relevant professional association.

You can start this now. You can begin thinking about the learning journey you have started in reading this chapter by doing some writing to the following prompts:

- What I read: summary of this chapter, highlighting what were, for you, the main point(s).
- What I got out of that section/paragraph/discussion, including questions it raised.
- I discussed this with a colleague/mentor (summarise). I have a better understanding and/or new questions about certain issues.
- What I plan to do next: further reading/discussion/action.