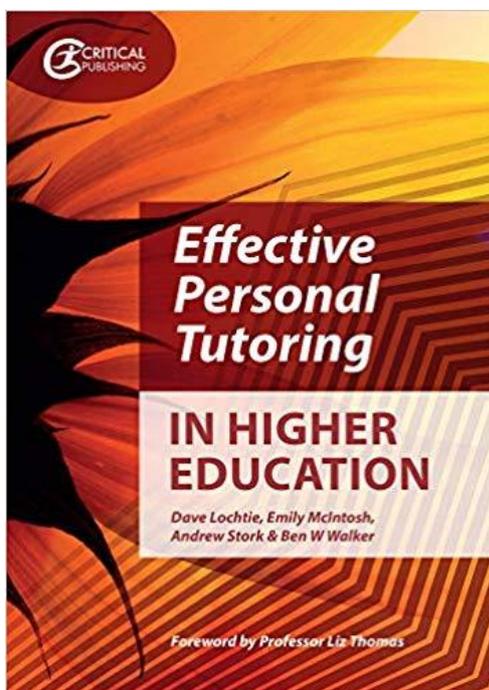




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Dave Lochtie, Emily McIntosh, Andrew Stork, and Ben Walker (2018) *Effective Personal Tutoring in Higher Education*, Northwich: Critical Publishing (ISBN 978-1-910391-98-3 [Pbk], 240pp)



While higher education is going through a period of turbulent change driven by the Teaching Excellence Framework and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), the refinement of the widening participation agenda, not to mention the Augar funding review, how we support students continues to be a perennial topic of discussion and contention. *Effective Personal Tutoring* offers a timely reminder of the role personal tutoring (PT) can play in supporting students but also of the complexity of PT models and

practice. It is worth reminding ourselves that the regulatory framework for HE states that students should be “supported to access, succeed in, and progress from, HE” (Office for Students, 2018: 14). The metrics applied by institutions to deliver on the TEF agenda such as attendance, progression, satisfaction and retention all need monitoring and supporting and it can be argued that PT plays a key role in doing this. This is the context of this book.

Effective Personal Tutoring complements *Becoming an Outstanding Personal Tutor*, which was developed specifically for Critical Publishing’s Further Education series (Stork and Walker, 2015). It applies a similar structure and draws on parallel principles. One of the over-arching ideas is that to be an effective personal tutor requires applying the principles to be an effective academic lecturer. These principles include listening and relating to people, sound pedagogy and subject expertise. The focus here is on a holistic approach to supporting student success and takes a student-centred approach throughout.

At certain places in the book the confusion around definitions of PT become apparent and the reader is encouraged to use their own institutional context in relation to PT. The complexity surrounding PT roles and definitions is evident in the first chapter where different definitions of PT are applied to form a list of eight different PT activities. These range from academic development, welfare, referral work to “engendering a

sense of belonging” and “embodiment and representative of the university” (p.13), and then goal-setting and solution-focused coaching.

The audience for the book is diverse and again reflects the complexity of PT within different institutional settings. Readers could be a new academic tasked with being a personal tutor for the first time, an experienced lecturer who wants to refresh their approach to PT, a manager with responsibility for delivering PT or someone working in student support services. The book is organised in nine chapters that starts with “what is a personal tutor?” before going on to cover core values and skills of the personal tutor in chapter two. Chapter three covers boundaries and then the book moves on to key activities of PT in chapters four and five. Chapter six introduces the concept of solution-focused coaching in relation to PT practice. Chapter seven addresses reflective practice and the professional development of personal tutors (rather than of their tutees) and chapter nine looks at how the impact of PT can be measured before finally concluding with a “what’s next?” conclusion. Each chapter starts with a statement of chapter aims and includes numerous case studies and critical thinking activities. Chapters then end with a summary, learning checklist, critical reflections prompts and a self-assessment system.

There is a practical toolkit approach throughout with real world case studies demonstrating how different PT approaches can be used in practice. The book does not require sequential reading: it can be dipped into or used as a reference source as required. Checklists, critical reflection

points and self-assessment prompts are used throughout the book. These could be helpful for new academics. There are a range of newer topics related to PT that could be useful to the more experienced and those with managerial responsibility. For instance, the chapter on solution-focused coaching offers a new perspective on what PT could achieve. Solution-focused coaching’s starting point is on “focusing on where they want to get to and understanding what skills and knowledge they need to get there” (p. 137) and as such links to the development of self-efficacy and independent learning.

The penultimate chapter on measuring impact raises some interesting questions on a thorny issue. Rather than addressing institutional measures of impact the focus here is on measuring impact at an individual personal tutor level. As such, while useful from the individual perspective, it misses the more institutionally political and policy orientated debates that can surround the resourcing of PT. The final chapter includes a longer institutional self-assessment that has been designed to be used by “a forward-thinking personal tutor, existing or aspiring manager or leader” (p. 207). The checklist uses the chapters of the book to measure current level of PT provision and to identify the next level to work towards with suggested actions. This could be useful as a starting point for any institution to think critically about how they support and resource PT.

What the book does not do is to problematise PT from an institutional perspective. As noted, there is little or no reflection on institutional PT policy or the resourcing of PT in terms of staffing levels

or workload allocation. The book illuminates the potential of PT both from a staff and student development viewpoint and, in doing this, it also highlights the resource intensive nature of delivering on a PT agenda that could ultimately benefit both students and the institution. The authors have not set out to critique PT policy or implementation and have written a practical book that will appeal to those new to teaching in particular.

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References

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