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Reviewing *From Research to Teaching: A Guide to Beginning Your Classroom Career*

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From Research to Teaching: A Guide to Beginning Your Classroom Career. By Michael Kibbe. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2021. 151 pp. ISBN 13: 978-0-8308-3918-6 (PAPERBACK) \$20

Reading Michael Kibbe's *From Research to Teaching: A Guide to Beginning your Classroom Career* feels like a relaxed conversation with a good friend who regales you with stories about a fun trip, interspersed with moments for self-reflection. Despite a lightness in the writing tone, the author skillfully engages readers in discussing some serious topics. Like the authors of most how-to books, Kibbe designs easy-to-travel pathways for readers and skillfully places signposts along the way to help them stay the course.

All too often, new college professors are thrust into the classroom and expected to survive with little or no preparation or support. Kibbe attempts to prepare unsuspecting new college professors, including those who are still engaged in graduate studies, by drawing a clear picture of what they are most likely to encounter and, more importantly, how they can prepare for the unexpected. His account of feeling overwhelmed during the first year of teaching is one among several that reflect how well he remembers the struggle of being a new college professor. He uses his wit and personal anecdotes to help new college professors walk this new, unfamiliar path of teaching, which is a far cry from the familiar, dusty hallways of research.

The book is divided into two parts that collectively address what teachers must do and know. Kibbe submits that although new college professors are experts in their chosen fields, they often lack training in the art and science of teaching. In this first part of the book, he presents a step-by-step, just-in-time training guide on how to prepare to teach, how actually to teach, and how to reflect meaningfully after teaching. Then, in the second part, he lays the foundations of what college professors must keep in mind as they prepare to teach.

Part One

In chapter one, Kibbe highlights four tasks that readers should perform to transition from graduate student to college professor. First, he encourages graduate students to finish their degrees, despite the challenges of teaching. Then he advises readers to read pedagogical research in order to garner “a set of resources that you can return to again and again” (p. 17). He also underscores having pedagogical mentors who are excellent teachers, forthright, available, personally invested, and in different phases of their careers. Kibbe makes two more suggestions: “Always aim for a target that you’ll never reach, and you’ll always have something to look forward to” (p. 31) and work at being prepared to teach.

In chapter two, Kibbe describes aspects of in-class performance such as being a performer and storyteller, having a personal signature—“the thing that makes you memorable” (p. 44), taking risks by trying new things, and knowing the center or goal of each lesson. He likens the latter to the relationship between a Sierpinski triangle (Online Fractal Tools, n.d.) and its fractals, and to the alignment of the chapters of a dissertation to its thesis. Kibbe declares that although teachers have numerous options regarding what to include in a lesson, they should predetermine the goal or center around which “every pedagogical act is oriented” (p. 67) in relation to a given lesson.

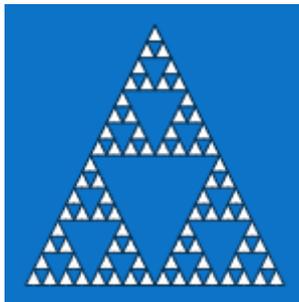


Figure 1: “The Sierpinski triangle is a fractal described in 1915 by Wacław Sierpinski. It is a self-similar structure that occurs at different levels of ... magnifications” (Parsons, p.1).

In chapter three, Kibbe stresses the importance of systematically documenting self-reflection and evaluations of classroom occurrences, emphasizing that “If you don’t write it down, it never happened” (p. 69). He also recommends a sabbath: “a stretch of time in which mind and body are enjoying what’s being done instead of doing it” (p. 76).

Part Two

Next, Kibbe turns his attention to four things new professors should know: Their mission and method, community, limitations, and power. He emphasizes that readers will be best able to determine their mission after having some teaching experience. Kibbe also proposes that new professors develop a plan or method to achieve their identified mission. He recommends that the method incorporates the teacher’s “delivery (mechanism), appearance (mannerism), surroundings (environment), and focus (centerpiece)” (p. 86).

Kibbe identifies students as a primary group to know in the academic community. He recommends learning their names, initiating and fostering appropriate in-class and out-of-class rapport with them, and creating learning opportunities that will challenge them intellectually and personally without making assumptions vis-à-vis their intellectual abilities in relation to their maturity. In subsequent chapters, he notes the negative impact that pursuing an academic career can have on one’s family. Therefore, he suggests intentionally establishing a work-life balance and regular family dialogues prior to accepting extra work commitments. He also recommends being an active listener, knowing one’s limitations, establishing boundaries, and observing sabbath to avoid burnout, failure, and ineffectiveness. Kibbe makes a salient argument in support of the need for new professors to encircle themselves with a variety of people to help with maintaining a healthy work/life balance, remaining teachable, and keeping a healthy and humble view of themselves. Furthermore, Kibbe advises new professors to avoid career sprints and the temptation to bite off more than they can chew.

As he closes this discourse, Kibbe reminds readers that God holds teachers to a higher level of accountability than other professionals

because of the impact of their speech on their audience. He identifies a teacher's influence in the following way: "The best teachers can do the most damage because their words have the most power" (p. 113). Therefore, "those of us who teach should be the most discerning when it comes to whether or not we should say something in a public venue" (p. 117).

Kibbe concludes the book with the admission that he is still in the process of learning how to implement his practice recommendations. He exhorts readers to treat the work as a guide on the journey towards the goal of continuous improvement. He also pleads with graduate schools to be more thoughtful and strategic in the way teaching loads are assigned to new college professors.

Implementation

Kibbe reminds novice professors that "teaching, like any other task, involves three phases: preparation, execution, and reflection ... [r]inse, repeat" (p. 6) and then lists practical steps for each stage of the process. These steps include "having a signature" (p. 44) and taking risks despite the risk of potential failure. Many faculty in higher education have not had pedagogical training and could benefit from professional development training that incorporates some of the principles Kibbe highlights.

A key piece of practical advice emerging from this book is the reminder to "take a sabbath." In a world where being busy is the norm, the author reminds readers to take this practical step. He reiterates that sabbath is not a time to work hard at something else other than academics; instead, it is a time when one is intentional about a break, where one does something different, such as spending time with people who are not in academics or turning off all communication devices.

Discussion

A primary strength of this book is its easy-to-read style. It feels like the kind of book that an exhausted, newly-minted, researcher-turned-faculty can read without being bogged down by the extensive footnotes

and cross-references that one is used to navigating. The ideas and the resources in the appendices are practical and easy to apply. In a time when professors struggle to integrate faith and learning, Kibbe directs faculty to establish a Christian foundation by identifying one's personal mission in the classroom and aligning it to the Greater Mission—"fellowship with the Triune God."

Other strengths include the author's ability to use his tongue-in-cheek humor, with statements such as "I know you'd rather be writing that next earth-shattering journal article that four people will read" (p. 74). This helps alleviate any anxiety or pressure that readers may experience while discussing some of the issues. Kibbe addresses the need to balance one's personal and professional life and challenges Christian faculty members to be mindful of the power they wield because of their positions.

An identifiable weakness in the work is the lack of examples from different disciplines. Kibbe draws on examples and anecdotes from the theological content in which he teaches to tell his story. However, a new faculty member from another field may not be able to connect to these examples and thus may not be able to take full advantage of the ideas presented. Another weakness is the absence of conversation surrounding culturally responsive pedagogy. If Kibbe had written this book for a global audience, he could have incorporated principles, practices, and strategies that new faculty members should consider as they begin their teaching careers.

Recommendations

This book is recommended for consideration in all teacher preparation institutions. The highlighted principles could be incorporated in training programs designed to help prepare and equip teacher candidates to navigate their initial years in the classroom more successfully. The work would also be an excellent resource to include in the training of teachers in the Teach for America program. Overall, this book would serve as a practical, resource-filled guide for teachers with different experience levels, as a refresher for the more seasoned professor, and as a relaxing but beneficial weekend read for new teachers.

REFERENCES

Kibbe, M. (2021). *From research to teaching: A guide to beginning your classroom career*. IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press.

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