

# BOOK REVIEW

*Reclaiming the Teaching Discourse in Higher Education: Curating a Diversity of Theory and Practice.* By Ian M. Kinchin (Ed) (2025). 234 pages. ISBN: 9781350411470 (print), London: Bloomsbury Academic. £ 63 (GBP) (hardcover)

In *Reclaiming the Teaching Discourse in Higher Education*, Ian Kinchin offers a critical and creative reimagining of university teaching amid neoliberal pressures and global uncertainty. Centering teaching as a relational, ethical, and co-creative act, the book challenges standardized, metric-driven practices and advocates for pedagogies rooted in care, embodiment, and ecological awareness. Across eleven chapters, Kinchin critiques current academic structures, explores teachers' lived experiences, and proposes transformative alternatives. The book ultimately serves as both a critique and a guide, inviting educators to reclaim teaching as a dynamic, hopeful force for social and institutional change.

Chapters 1 to 5 evaluate the current state of teaching in higher education, advocating for more relational, dynamic, and human-centered approaches. Chapter 1 reconceptualizes belonging not as a fixed emotional state but as a dynamic, relational, and embodied process shaped by social, material, and emotional interactions. It emphasizes how teachers foster belonging through micro-moments of connection, counterspaces of care, and counternarratives of resistance. Chapter 2 challenges static views of 'lived experience', advocating for a dynamic understanding of 'living experiences'. Teaching should be a process of becoming, and pedagogy is supposed to provide spaces for ethical and inclusive engagement. Chapter 3 highlights post-observation feedback as a collaborative and reflective practice that supports continuous professional development, urging a shift away from judgment toward dialogue. In Chapter 4, insights from other professions offer valuable enlightenment and inspiration for teaching, demonstrating that teaching should not be confined to formal educators but can be enriched by views from diverse occupations. Chapter 5 calls for the integration of humanizing pedagogies to support student well-being, arguing that care-centered teaching is essential in the face of increasing mental health challenges. Collectively, these chapters challenge traditional teaching norms, urging a rethinking of higher education teaching from the perspective of care, connection and adaptability.

Chapters 6 to 9 present a shift from critique to creativity, envisioning new ways of teaching that prioritize embodiment, spatiality, co-agency, and sustainability. In chapter 6, the author criticizes the neoliberal rationality that is widely spread in the discourse of higher education policy, especially the uncritical embrace of digital technologies under the guise of 'enhancement'. Through the concept of 'McPolicy', the author reveals how dehumanized and repetitive policy language erases educators' agency and advocates a post-digital approach rooted in lived experience, inclusiveness, and critical engagement with identity and power. Chapter 7 extends the criticism to the ecological crisis, arguing that higher education has failed to respond meaningfully due to disciplinary fragmentation and neoliberal inertia. Therefore, it calls for an 'ecological university' that embraces interdisciplinary studies and environmental consciousness. Chapter 8 discusses the stagnation of curriculum theory, arguing that dominant and counter-hegemonic curriculum traditions remain Eurocentric. To move beyond this, the author proposes Itinerant Curriculum Theory (ICT), which is a decolonized relational framework that emphasizes epistemological diversity and justice-oriented practice. Chapter 9 criticizes neoliberal ideas that treat students as consumers, reducing education to a transactional service. In response, it advocates collaborative and student-centered pedagogies which recognize diverse identities, promote meaningful engagement, and ultimately call for educational reforms

grounded in inclusion, co-agency, and care. Together, these chapters challenge the structural and ideological limitations of current academic models and offer bold, imaginative alternatives that rehumanize education and restore its ethical, ecological, and political dimensions.

Chapters 10 and 11 synthesize earlier insights and offer two imaginative frameworks for rethinking higher education. Chapter 10 introduces diffractive enquiry, a posthuman, relational pedagogy that challenges neoliberal ideals of efficiency, individualism, and linear progress, especially in the wake of COVID-19's disruption of academic time and space. Emphasizing the entanglement of space, time, and materiality ('spacetime-matter'), it promotes affective, interdisciplinary learning through activities like mapping and storytelling, allowing students to examine power structures and envision more ethical, inclusive futures. Notably, this approach is particularly relevant in today's increasingly hybrid and uncertain educational environments, where overlapping crises shape students' lived experiences and require more responsive, meaningful forms of engagement. By integrating art, narrative, and theory, diffractive enquiry invites a more holistic and humanizing mode of learning that resonates with the needs of a generation seeking purpose and connection in their education. Chapter 11 builds on the idea of the 'ecological university', positioning teaching as a transformative force within the institutional ecosystem. It outlines five strategies for systemic change—such as narrative ecologies, post-abysal thinking, and sustainable pedagogies—and critiques standardized teacher development in favor of relational, context-driven approaches. Obviously, this vision aligns powerfully with current global calls for sustainability and interdisciplinary problem-solving.

This book is both diagnostic and visionary. It not only reveals the challenges of contemporary university teaching but also proposes possible solutions and approaches. Based on the current situation, the book provides a generative roadmap for rethinking that teaching is not merely about content delivery but a critical social practice for shaping the future. In this sense' the book serves as both a mirror, reflecting the complexities and contradictions of the present, and a compass, guiding educators, administrators, and scholars who strive to teach with integrity, care, and purpose in an era marked by uncertainty and change. However, several points deserve further elaboration. Although the criticism of neoliberalism is sharp and the alternative pedagogical visions are radical, the book lacks sufficient detailed information about how these approaches can be effectively implemented within rigid and audit-driven institutions. For example, concepts such as 'diffractive enquiry' and 'ecological university' are rich in meaning and promise, but their application in the everyday teaching context remains unexplored. Providing more concrete strategies or illustrative case studies would enhance the book's utility for educators seeking actionable change.

In conclusion, this book offers valuable enlightenment and inspiration for reimagining university teaching in the post-neoliberal era. By reimagining teaching as a generative, embodied, and ecologically harmonious act, the book shows what teaching and maintaining hope mean in an era full of challenges and uncertainties. This book can serve not only as a critical reflection on current challenges but also as a lasting companion for educators committed to re-enchanting higher education.

Zhang Lingzhan  
Zhejiang University  
22303019@zju.edu.cn