

### BOOK REVIEW

Michael Kibbe. *From Research to Teaching: A Guide to Beginning your Classroom Career*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021. xiv + 138 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-0-8308-3918-6. \$13.79.

Teaching is complex. “No matter your personality . . . prior experience, or the specifics of your situation, the transition from graduate studies to teaching involves a set of challenges for which no one is ever fully prepared” (back cover). Enter Michael Kibbe’s *From Research to Teaching*. The author’s goal is modest; he hopes this book can be a “helpful and encouraging companion along the way” (5). Kibbe succeeds!

Aside from the introduction and conclusion, three appendices (“Using Your Dissertation in the Classroom,” “A Plea to Graduate Schools,” and “Great Teaching Resources”) as well as the fine foreword by Gary M. Burge, *From Research to Teaching* is comprised of two main parts: (1) “What Teachers Must Do” and (2) “What Teachers Must Know.” There are no indices.

The first part of the book focuses on three key stages: (1) what to do before entering the classroom (preparation), (2) what to do in the classroom (execution), and (3) what to do when class is over (reflection). The second half of the book focuses on “Mission and Method” (83–92), “Community” (93–104), “Limitations” (105–12), and “Power” (113–21)

Kibbe uses the Sierpinski triangle (58) to communicate the necessity of mission: “If I don’t know what the top point on the triangle is, I can’t orient everything else toward it. I need a mission, and the mission has to be (1) broad enough to direct every pedagogical move I make, and (2) specific enough to direct every pedagogical move I make” (83, italics removed).

Concerning community, Kibbe offers some excellent advice: (1) Know your students, and (2) Know your family. Knowing

your students involves knowing their names, positively engaging their lives, and setting reasonable expectations for them, bearing developmental gaps in mind. As for knowing one's own family, Kibbe personally reflects, "[n]avigating the work-family dynamic as an academic is hard [but] as long as we keep communicating, as long as we see each other as partners rather than opponents, and as long as I stay clued in to how my professional world affects her and the kids, we're going to be alright" (103–4). Regarding limitations, Kibbe asserts, "the question is less, How much can you accomplish? And more, What, exactly, do you want to accomplish? . . . the follow-up is always, What am I opting *out* of accomplishing when I opt *into* accomplishing what I want to accomplish?" (106, italics original).

Notable tidbits on power include "setting an example by calmly discussing claims with which we disagree, and sometimes straightforwardly dismantling bad ideas, without crushing the person who expressed them. So don't fight fire with fire . . . and for sure don't start the fire yourself (117). Kibbe also discusses social media and self-promotion. His "helpful, not helpful, and maybe helpful" delineation of the answer to the question "When does professional communication become narcissism?" is particularly astute (see, especially, 118–21).

With respect to preparation (i.e., what to do before entering class), Kibbe states, "Be fanatical in your devotion to pedagogical research" (15). About execution, Kibbe opines, "Teacher, thy name is performer. Oh, that more of us would realize this!" (35). Why is this? To put the matter glibly, "the only thing harder than getting people's attention is keeping it" (41).

Pertaining to reflection (i.e., what to do once class is over), Kibbe advocates all faculty keep a teaching journal where one makes notes and records what is and is not working, why, and what one ought to do about it: "If you don't write it down, it never happened" (69). Therefore, "write it down . . . write it down now . . . write it down consistently . . . follow up on what you wrote down" (73–74). This advice alone is worth the price of the book if one truly commits to it.

Concerning Appendix A "Using Your Dissertation in the Classroom," Kibbe seeks to reinforce that "your most successful

teaching sessions will be those built on your strongest research foundation, because you have in those instances the greatest amount of discernment as to what information needs to be communicated and what information does not” (130, italics removed). Even so, whenever one does choose to leverage one’s dissertation, one must ensure it is “course appropriate . . . [the] session still has to contribute to the mission of the course” (127).

Space forbids an exhaustive compendium of Kibbe’s (many) other notable maxims. Some of them include the following: “I don’t care if my students can outline the book of Romans. I care that Romans has taken hold of them. I care that they are captivated by it” (61); “A signature is not the thing that makes you *great*—it’s the thing that makes you *memorable* . . . But your goal isn’t simply to make them remember *you*—it’s to make them remember something worth remembering” (44–45, italics original); “Don’t ask . . . ‘does this make sense?’ . . . Ask them a specific question that forces them to demonstrate whether or not they’ve understood what you’ve communicated” (63).

By way of critique, I have few quibbles with this book. The prose is lucid and clear, and the author’s illustrations cover a broad range including sports, comedy, music, and movies. One may, though, question choosing *The Sopranos* and *Game of Thrones* as examples (38, 43).

While Kibbe does discuss online education, saying— somewhat tongue in cheek, perhaps—“Well, we’re all online faculty at the moment, aren’t we?” (5; cf. 133) as he writes this volume from home during the coronavirus pandemic, he does not go out of his way to thoroughly discuss those elements most useful to educators who *predominantly* teach online. To this end, direct engagement with the best resources available at large would have been a boon.

With respect to the author’s assertion “A dissertation is done when it’s *published*” (14, italics original), suffice it to say that it is insufficient to state, “This isn’t the place to walk you through all the hoops; your dissertation committee will be the place to go for advice on publishers” (15). More details may be found in Nijay K. Gupta’s *Prepare, Succeed, Advance: A Guidebook for Getting a PhD in Biblical Studies and Beyond* (2nd ed. Eugene,

OR: Cascade, 2019) and Stanley E. Porter's *Inking the Deal: A Guide for Successful Academic Publishing* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010).

Penultimately, while the appendix "Great Teaching Resources" is quite well organized, the absence of annotations severely limits its usefulness. Would it not have been prudent for the author to have included brief blurbs outlining the main premise of each book and how, specifically, each of the volumes helped him, personally? Many faculty, most likely, will also spot the conspicuous absence of some of their own favorite books. For instance, Gordon T. Smith's *Institutional Intelligence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017) and Marilla Svinicki and Wilbert J. McKeachie's *McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers* (14th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2014) should not be overlooked.

Perhaps the most controversial (but also the most necessary?) part of *From Research to Teaching* is Appendix B "A Plea to Graduate Schools." In this section, Kibbe jibes, "Graduate schools, you are in the business of training teachers. And, if I may be blunt, some of you have some room for improvement in that business" (9). The author goes on to delineate some best practices which could be implemented, which include: (1) if graduate students are serving as a teaching assistant to a course, "give them more to do than grade papers"; (2) "if graduate students . . . teach a course, make it an elective rather than a survey"; (3) ensure graduate teachers are given effective "oversight, evaluation, feedback, mentoring, etc." (134). Kibbe is also quick to remind readers: "reading books on teaching is not the same as teaching"; "theorizing on teaching" is "far more useful when engaged within the context of actually teaching" (133). One suggestion Kibbe did not mention is scheduling term colloquies on teaching. McMaster Divinity College, for instance, requires students in the PhD program in Christian Theology to participate in a teaching colloquy as part of their graduation requirements (see Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Those Who Can, Teach: Teaching as a Christian Vocation*. McMaster General Studies 3. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013).

Irrespective of these (relatively minor) things, however, *From Research to Teaching* offers great help to for new teachers. As Gary M. Burge states in the foreword, “This is a great book that should be in the hands of every new faculty member. Even experienced faculty will benefit” (xi). Highly recommended!

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