



BOOK REVIEW

Geeky Pedagogy: A Guide for Intellectuals, Introverts, and Nerds Who Want to Be Effective Teachers

Jessamyn Neuhaus

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(xi + 249 pages, ISBN 978-1-949199-06-2, \$21.50)

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Attention: Intellectuals, Introverts, and Nerds! Do you want to be an effective teacher? If so, *Geeky Pedagogy* offers some highly useful and engaging guidance for you. The author, history professor Jessamyn Neuhaus, understands that terms like geek, nerd, and introvert are *not* pejoratives. Indeed, she numbers herself among those (of us) who identify as “academic nerds and scholarly geeks,” who love “to be alone with our thoughts,” and who are, after all, “the *experts* in our fields” (10; italics in the original). In short, Neuhaus offers “an overview of the teaching and learning rollercoaster, written with my own tribe of brainy, introverted academic nerds and scholars in mind” (18).

Geeky Pedagogy contains five core chapters: Awareness, Preparation, Reflection, Support, and Practice. Neuhaus cleverly introduces and concludes each chapter with quotations from geek pop culture, from Sherlock to SpongeBob, Tolkien to Star Trek, Harry Potter to Black Panther. But Neuhaus’s take on effective pedagogy is not so much about geek-cred as it is about giving potential Poindexters a state-of-the-art application of the best ideas from the Scholarship of Teaching in Learning (SoTL). In other words, she cites Dr. Stephen Brookfield (quoted often) more than she cites Dr. Who (mentioned but once, and then only in an endnote).

The author’s ode to educators who identify as Geeks, Introverts, and Nerds (collectively dubbed “GINS”) starts with an admonishment to be aware of their intended audience, namely, students. Neuhaus explains why student identities matter, why learning can be so difficult, and why GINS ought to make like Socrates and “Know Thyself.” *Geeky Pedagogy* then moves to the theme of preparedness. Introverted eggheadedness can (apparently) cause GINS to appear uncaring, inaccessible, detached, and inscrutable to students. Neuhaus elaborates here on what it means to “put on your professor pants” and act the part: not only working on standard SoTL concerns such as learning outcomes, course design, and relevant assignments and assessment, but also on what can seem like a tall order for GINS – relying less on PowerPoint and more on activities that help build rapport with and between students.

I found the chapter titled “Reflection” to be the most challenging and the most poignant. Neuhaus points out that even the most beloved professor can recall “every wounding word” (94) of a negative Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET). *Geeky Pedagogy* doesn’t promise that GINS will be able to avoid that painful, overly harsh insult anonymously rendered by that disgruntled student at the end of the term. But it does contend that soliciting student feedback throughout the term will help students give honest, fair, and useful feedback along the way. Neuhaus is not the inventor of this strategy, of course. However, she offers gentle correction and spot-on guidance for those (of us) prone to discounting student input.

“Some consistently ineffective college teachers with decades of teaching behind them have convinced themselves that student learning is not their responsibility but rather entirely the students’ problem” (146). Such a description is unlikely to apply to any Geek, Introvert, or Nerd interested in reading up on effective teaching and learning. Neuhaus’s final two chapters nevertheless exhort GINS to do what is somewhat against their (our) nature: seek and secure support for their pedagogical development and then practice, practice, practice.

As Yoda might say, “Appreciate this book, you will.”