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Book review of 99 Tips for Creating Simple and Sustainable Educational Videos by Karen Costa

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BOOK REVIEW OF COSTA, K. (2020). 99 TIPS FOR CREATING SIMPLE AND SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS. STYLUS PUBLISHING.

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Abstract

Book review of Costa, K. (2020). *99 Tips for Creating Simple and Sustainable Educational Videos*. Stylus Publishing. This article discusses Costa's book from the perspective of both experienced asynchronous instructors and those thrust into different delivery methods due to education challenges created by the pandemic.

Keywords: teaching, videos, asynchronous, review, flipped

“Pandemic” and “COVID-19” are two terms that do not appear in Karen Costa's *99 Tips for Creating Simple and Sustainable Educational Videos*, and for good reason—Costa's book was released in March 2020, right as the pandemic was in the early stages of changing so many aspects of life, including higher education. It is not mentioned because, as Costa was writing the book, it had not yet happened. However, it is difficult to read the book without thinking of how the pandemic has forced higher education instructors to relearn—or newly learn—so many aspects of teaching. This new world could include asynchronous learning where classes are not “live” but instead taught with prerecorded videos or tasks assigned on learning management software (LMSs) like Canvas. While this book will benefit instructors by teaching how best to create instructional videos, students will also benefit, many of whom will be new to LMSs and asynchronous teaching. This practical and theory-driven book is a valuable resource for those new to creating video components for courses (whether for asynchronous, hybrid, or flipped courses). It also provides excellent advice and guidance for those with more experience.

As promised in the title, the book is structured into 99 tips for teaching through videos, and she discusses the merits of using videos in land-based, online, hybrid, and flipped courses. The tips themselves are further split into twelve sections in which each tip within a given section relates to a main theme. These sections include why videos work, how videos can align with course objectives, and tips for presentation, among others. The tips range from the practical (Tip 54 is “Keep the Camera Lens Level with your Face”) to the more theoretical (Tip #29: “Apply Aesthetic Usability Effect”). While the tips always tie back to effective video creation, much of this information would be valuable for teachers of all delivery methods, including the five tips that make up section eight, “Using PowerPoint in your Videos.” While the word “videos” is specified, the advice here applies to a wide range of teaching and conference-presenting. For example, Tip 70 within this section is entitled, “Use Your Slides to Present Ideas, Not as Speaker Notes.” Costa explains that PowerPoint slides “are meant to grab the audience's attention and to illustrate (which means to visually display) critical content. Then, you, as the speaker, add in additional information in spoken form” (p. 111). She then follows this with practical advice on how to embed notes in PowerPoint's presentation mode.

As a guide through online teaching and videos, Costa is trustworthy and reliable. Her decade and a half in education and online instruction are evident not only through the advice provided but also through myriad examples that verify the effectiveness of these tips. Prior to this book, she published several articles on how best to adapt to current technolo-

gies to assist students, including how to teach digital notetaking to college students (“The Nuance of Notetaking”) and how online education specifically benefits introverted students (“Quiet Power”). While this is her first book, her experience in video-based teaching (and online education in general) is conveyed via her attention to detail and her grounded perspective. The tips presented are supported consistently by research—a third of the tips contain specific academic references and those that do not are supported by her teaching experience (as shown through examples in the text). The book builds from her experiences, research, and dedication to her students’ needs. Her personal and accessible writing style helps acquaint the reader with her teaching style. For example, in Tip #3, she speaks about her teaching priorities:

While a lot of other factors go into forming how and why I teach (challenge and support, validation, fun, brain-based teaching), all of it rests on my understanding that by getting to know my students, and letting them get to know me, our teaching and learning journey together will be more fruitful and enjoyable. (p. 28)

This early statement of purpose effectively conveys her priorities to the reader. By acknowledging both apprehensions instructors have about teaching through videos because of a perceived difficulty in relationship-building with students in asynchronous environments and illustrating her dedication to relationship-building, the reader realizes that finding ways to “know” students (and for them to “know” the instructor) are achievable. She provides both this statement of purpose and other examples to prove the credibility of her philosophy.

Like the rest of the book, those examples are presented with conversational academic vernacular, and the book is engaging tonally. Considering one of Costa’s core beliefs in teaching is the importance of providing an authentic self to students, it is valuable to show that philosophy within the book’s prose. The book is welcoming. In addition to an inviting academic-casual tone, she includes personable narratives to establish and justify the book’s tips. She also incorporates several QR codes throughout the book that link to YouTube videos in which she further explains concepts introduced in the tip with which the code was linked. While this could be perceived as gimmicky, these QR codes are used effectively in execution. These embedded videos show real-world examples of the concepts she describes, making her advice relatable and achievable. Considering the book frequently discusses the merits of creating a relatable persona for students, it also makes the relationship between reader and writer more accessible—compared to most book authors, the reader connects to Costa because of these videos and has greater trust for her methods.

While practical, the book is also firmly grounded in theory. While the first two sections establish the value inherent in using videos in higher education teaching, the third shows the theoretical framework for her suggestions, providing multiple theories to discuss the philosophies shared in the book, starting with an introduction and application of the community of inquiry model in Tip 24. The tips themselves are short but consequential. They pack a lot of content in their brief bursts, including relevant teaching/personal anecdotes and necessary supplementary material. These theory-driven tips are well-connected to the rest of the book and convincingly researched.

This book effectively builds off recent research in higher education, but its narrow focus on video creation allows for a more comprehensive look at that aspect of asynchronous, blended, or flipped teaching than anything else available. For example, Kathryn E. Linder’s *The Blended Course Workbook: A Practical Guide* (2017) contains guidance on video creation in a section entitled “Best Practice for Creating Multimedia Resources” (p. 118). *Small Teaching Online: Apply Learning Science in Online Classes* (2019) by Flower Darby with James Lang discusses the unique challenges of online learning and how to make connections in the online environment. Both of these books are valuable but possess comprehensive intentionality. While both of these books discuss strategies for video creation, Costa’s focus on the topic (while still providing general advice on online teaching using video creation as a starting point) helps it stand apart and encourages teaching scholars to follow Costa’s path. Perhaps this book will inspire more narrowly focused practical guides to online teaching, perhaps ones concentrated on working within LMS constructs or crafting a personal presence in online teaching.

The book’s clever format consistently delivers short pieces of advice and, for most of this advice, that brevity is appreciated. This is especially true of practical tips like avoiding wearing eyeglasses to prevent glare from the screen and using the

earbuds that came with your smartphone as a microphone. Both are great pieces of advice that do not require much elaboration (and I have already integrated both into my personal video-making strategies). But there are times when the short sections leave the reader wanting more. Specifically, the fourth section discusses different video presentation options, such as the benefits of recording “talking head videos” and the merits of recording on a webcam or a phone. This section is valuable in this text because an instructor who approaches educational video creation with trepidation needs the practical guidance offered within these tips. While the book explains these topics well, these were subjects where I found myself wanting to know more about her perspective. She explains the merits of these various methods, but using more experience-based anecdotes would have been worthwhile. The aforementioned section on theory (Section Three) provided good introductions to the theories presented, but even a little more information could have done more to promote effective application.

Of course, this book is so effective, simply wanting more of what it provides is hardly a criticism. It is a book that embraces practicality, shown through most of the tips and emphasized through a final section entitled “Practical Exercises,” in which she provides an effective range of hands-on exercises. Like the expert teacher she clearly is, Costa effectively leaves the reader with an important lesson to end the book: to speak honestly to your students by letting your heart guide the way. Ultimately, the main message I took from the book is that teachers best teach through their hearts and their heads, and video creation should not be seen as an obstacle but instead as an opportunity to connect even more effectively with our students.

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