



[Book Review] *Centers for Teaching and Learning: The New Landscape in Higher Education* by Mary C. Wright

Centers for Teaching and Learning begins with the simple intention to uncover how many centres for teaching and learning (CTLs) exist within US higher education. In answering this question, we are brought on a curiosity-driven journey that provides an opportunity to reflect on the “why” and “how” of educational development. The book plots a course that shows the changing landscape and suggests how existing and future CTLs can find a strategic focus based on lessons learned by other centers.

Wright employs four powerful metaphorical lenses: Hub Incubator Temple Sieve (HITS), building on previous work (POD Network 2018). The HITS model is used to interrogate strategies for change as well as providing an evaluative lens on individual CTLs. The author deftly interweaves dense quantitative data with illustrative case studies to illuminate key points about changing priorities, trends, and the need for CTLs to foster and lead change.

This book is relevant to a wide audience, including senior management reviewing teaching and learning supports, educational developers interested in institutional change, higher education faculty keen to place their teaching development within a broader context, and student partners seeking a broader understanding of the higher education landscape.

CTLs are in a state of continuous evolution, an aspect often missed by research at a particular point in time. By consistently referring to previous studies, Wright provides a longitudinal picture that captures the shifting emphasis and constitution of CTLs across the US. The book also tracks the development and expansion of SoTL within centres. It highlights key trends, such as the growing number of CTLs in institutions serving diverse student populations. This speaks to the increasingly integrative role of CTLs. The book also charts a broadening of CTLs as they shift from supporting individual instructors to assisting with leadership functions and student-focused constituencies.

Cruz, Steiner, and Cruz (2024) point to the lack of studies on the practices CTLs use to support SoTL. This book advances work in this under-researched area and comments on the potential of CTLs as actors in broader organizational change initiatives. Wright's work provides insights into these macro level (i.e. institutional) activities, as well as possible frameworks for interpretation.

It could be argued that this work sits at the intersection of SoTL and educational development practice. Here, we relay our perspectives from two different traditions (educational development and SoTL) on how this publication advances work in both fields.

Catherine O'Mahony: I am the director of a CTL in Ireland which has a strong SoTL focus in its staff development programmes. The deep description in this book provides great richness and charts a path forward for further study. In this work, SoTL is considered under the “sieve” frame of the HITS model, as it provides an evidence base to shape practice. Yet SoTL can also be considered as a form of pedagogy, as is the case in educational development (Felten and Chick 2018), which may open other potential frames within the HITS model to explore SoTL.

While SoTL is lauded for its disciplinary plurality, it is critiqued for supposedly being undertheorized. This book provides numerous examples of how to utilize the HITS model to explore the

how and why of the discipline. The transferability to other SoTL practitioners is perhaps limited, as not all will hold the institutional lens, but intra-institutional studies are growing in number, and many are taking CTLs as their focal point (e.g. Mihai et al. 2025 and Zhang 2025). The HITS model certainly could be used as a reflective device for developing a more concrete and coherent set of supports to develop SoTL within an institution or in intra-institutional partnerships.

Alexandra Mihai: I am an assistant professor in higher education at a Dutch university working in a faculty-based CTL. For educational development practitioners, often based within CTLs of various forms and sizes, the book provides a useful framework to better understand the context in which they operate. Moreover, practitioners can find inspiration and validation in the examples provided.

Wright's work provides a much-needed overview and analysis of CTLs as institutionalised forms of educational development. While existing literature often focuses on forms of educational development activities, this book is centred around the institutional perspective, adding an important layer of understanding regarding how CTLs are positioned and how they interact with the institutions they belong to. This brings both educational development work and research to a new level, thereby supporting that teaching and learning can (and possibly should) be seen in alignment with the overall institutional vision of universities.

The book provides a bird's eye view of a field that often lacks this broader perspective. Much of the existing literature focuses on case studies that are context dependent and often capture only specific aspects of CTL functioning. The data contained in this book puts the work of CTLs in perspective while also highlighting challenges. Moreover, being data-rich, the book can be used as a reference source, both in future research and practically by CTLs in their regular activity.

With the advent of web-scraping tools, also used by Cruz, Steiner, and Cruz (2024), this publication provides an outline of how to utilise public facing web pages and grey literature to provide sector level insights. As the author suggests, such a systematic and comprehensive approach to researching and mapping CTLs could be applied to other geographical contexts to provide a thorough analysis of CTL identity, goals, and activities.

By providing an overview of different models of CTL governance, the book can support both new and existing CTLs in defining or refining their identity. The examples provided by the authors for the HITS roles can offer inspiration for CTL directors and staff in developing new activities and assessing the impact of existing ones. Overall, the book offers new and emerging CTLs a language to build their profile and strategic vision.

CTLs need to carefully and continuously redefine their mission and identity as they increasingly move from faculty development to organisational development; this book provides a useful framework for this transition. One of the risks CTLs encounter by extending their agendas is becoming estranged from their main target audience (faculty) and perceived as an arm of the establishment. CTLs are also vulnerable to changes in university leadership and to overall circumstances, such as budget cuts, making it even more important to consolidate their position and reinforce their relevance to the core mission of the university. This positioning also brings about new opportunities, as CTLs can now shape the institutional agenda, bringing teaching and learning to the forefront. The key for CTLs to thrive is being well integrated in HE governance structures, both internally, within the universities they operate in, and externally, in the context of broader alliances and consortia.

Further, the book discusses examples within a US context; considering our European contexts provides a useful point of comparison. We both work in universities which are involved in European

University Alliances. Born out of the desire to strengthen transnational cooperation across the European Higher Education Area, 64 multi-partner alliances have emerged since 2018. The European University Alliances are tasked with shaping the universities of the future through a long-term shared strategy of excellence in teaching and research. Innovative teaching is emphasised in almost all alliances; however, few have identified in depth what need or teaching challenge emergent innovations respond to or how to know when goals are achieved. Increasingly CTLs are the connection point in alliance work. This book suggests a future approach for interrogating these alliances and uncovering the theory of change that CTLs use in support of their alliance ambitions.

The book provides an in-depth exploration of CTLs in the American higher education landscape, using a longitudinal lens that allows for a better understanding of the changes CTLs undergo over time. Its richness in terms of data and key literature make this book valuable from both a SoTL and an educational development perspective, as well as useful for researchers and CTL practitioners alike. The HITS model can be used as a framework to prompt reflection and thus support CTL directors and staff in better understanding and positioning their work. While the book focuses on the American context, the author proposes areas for further study that are transferable to other geographical regions.

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