When I read the case studies of quality teaching collected in this book, three key features stood out for me as at the heart of the collection. It struck me that bringing these considerations together in reflective cases is the book’s distinctive contribution to our literature on exemplary teaching and learning in higher education. I offer my reflections here as a guide to readers about the value you can discover in these cases, and as my thanks for the labour of love they represent by the authors and by Diane Salter as their editor.

The first feature that struck me was the remarkable range of disciplines, contexts, and countries represented; this breadth caused me to think more deeply about what was common across the quality teaching described and what might be more rooted in the strengths of these particular teachers, the challenges of their subject areas, and the needs of their learners and their local circumstances. For the Canadian case studies, where I understood something about the local context, why did I find myself equally inspired by examples from subjects I had taught—such as David Dunne’s (Chapter 11) description of teaching design-based thinking to students in management courses—and those areas that were new to me, like visual literacy to students in medicine by Carol-Ann Courneya (Chapter 4) or Elliot Currie’s technology use in accounting for resource-based learning and flipped classrooms (ch 8)? What adjustments would I have to make to the methods and approaches in other cases from different types of institutions and other countries (UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong)?

The second feature—or question—that caught my attention was the variety of definitions of “quality teaching” that the case studies presented. While all of the cases emphasized high quality outcomes for our students, some considered quality teaching to also touch on high quality outcomes for us as educators, and for institutions and communities. Lin Norton and Tessa Owens (UK, Chapter 13), for example, present a case study of a community of practice in pedagogical action research as a way to “influence policy and practice within their departments, their institutions, and ultimately, across the sector.” Further impacts by Spencer Benson (US, Chapter 15)
across an entire institution, and by Geraldine Lefoe and Dominique Parrish (Australia, Chapter 22) extending across institutions. Gray Kochhar-Lindgren (Hong Kong and US, Chapter 22) explores interdisciplinary capabilities as a critical outcome of the “global university” and describes teaching methods to foster their development.

Another aspect of quality teaching that I noted was the extent to which it is exemplary teaching: some high quality teaching can serve more readily as a model for other teachers and contexts. In some cases, the exemplary teaching becomes shareable through resources for teachers and learners that can be adapted, re-used, and extended by others. For example, Gregor Campbell (UK, Chapter 5) describes a set of reusable resources and adaptable learning design methods for histology instruction. Many of these exemplary approaches are of course generalizable to other disciplines, and some chapter authors explicitly explore what this might entail. Ron Oliver (Australia, Chapter 6) describes how “to use technology in ways that enhance [rather than mimic] conventional practices…with a view to offering readers a sense of how they might adapt such approaches to their own teaching.”

In addition, thinking of quality teaching as “exemplary” leads to another aspect of quality: teaching that demonstrates the practices of knowing and doing we want to foster in our students. Sometimes this exemplary quality is implicit in the teaching practices: Tanya Chichekian et al. (Canada, Chapter 10) talk about their own inquiry-based learning as teachers as part of their description of ways to develop student capability for inquiry, and Cath Ellis (UK, Chapter 14) uses her own personal learning as an exemplar for encouraging student use of self-paced on-demand resources in English literature.

In other chapters, the exemplary nature of the teaching practices is made explicit for learners by sharing the teacher’s example as part of the process: L. C. Chan (Hong Kong, Chapter 3) explores the practice of mindfulness to enhanced learning and teaching, and Lynne Hunt (Australia, Chapter 12) describes quality teaching in the social sciences emphasizing “students’ active engagement in learning-by-doing” through the teacher’s active engagement in learning-by-doing, with specific role shifts in her priorities such as “less time spent [by the teacher] being a custodial risk minimiser and more time spent being an experimenter and risk-taker.”

As a third key feature for me, there are numerous case studies exploring how quality teaching can be fostered as an organizational goal. Here again, the approaches reflect differing institutional contexts and cultures, and I found the whole was greater than the sum of the parts. The range of examples was both informative and challenging, on conceptual and practical levels. As just a few examples of the variety of approaches, Hunt and Sankey (Australia, Chapter 23) take an organizational development perspective on for quality teaching, Harry Hubball et al. (Canada, Chapter 20) focus on quality approaches to peer-review of teaching, Peter Felton
and Ashley Finley (US, Chapter 21) look at the relative contribution of traditional teaching awards to fostering quality teaching (hint: not much!), Grant Campbell (UK, Chapter 16) describes approaches to teaching new faculty about quality assessment of their students, and Iain Doherty (New Zealand, Chapter 23) discusses appropriate resources and supports to help teachers to achieve high quality in teaching.

You will find that Diane Salter’s introductory chapter puts these issues into context via data from an international survey of award-winning teachers. I suspect each of you as readers will find your own way to connect the dots between the cases and be encouraged and challenged by them; to help with making those links, do include in your reading Chapter 2 by Mike Prosser: a concise summary of decades of his research with Keith Trigwell and other colleagues about the value chain connecting improvements in student learning outcomes to faculty teaching and our institutional efforts to enhance it.

I trust this gives you a glimpse of what a reader can glean from these case studies and the important issues they raise. Whatever your institutional context, these are important issues for efforts to enhance the quality of learning and teaching, whether you are blessed to be in a place where quality teaching is already held in high regard or challenged by a context where competing institutional priorities might easily hold you back—perhaps especially in the latter! These are changing times for higher education, and the cases provided by our authors demonstrate how a renewed commitment and fresh thinking can energize continuing advances in quality teaching and learning.

Thomas Carey
San Diego State University, USA & Athabasca University, Canada

Tomas Carey leads strategic faculty collaborations for exemplary teaching in higher education institutions and systems across North America. In the US, he is a Research Professor in the Center for Research in Mathematics and Science Education at San Diego State University, and recently served as Senior Partner at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Visiting Scholar in the California State University Office of the Chancellor. In Canada, he is a visiting scholar in the Technology Enhanced Knowledge Research Institute at Athabasca University, and recently served as Senior Research Director for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario and Associate Vice President for Learning Resources and Innovation at the University of Waterloo.