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Book Review

What teachers need to know about teaching methods

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Introduction

The book, entitled 'What Teachers Need to Know about Teaching Methods' by Peter Westwood, explores the concept of teaching and learning, effective teaching methods, and assessment of learning. According to the book, in the early 20th century, teacher-directed instruction was the most popular pedagogy alongside the heavy use of textbooks. By the 1950s, a project approach was promoted to engage students in more group work. Slowly, new teaching methods, such as activity-based teaching, and new educational media, such as TV and movies, were introduced. In the 1970s, the effectiveness of teaching approaches and psychology were extensively explored by researchers to provide evidence of the appropriateness and efficacy of a particular teaching method associated with the type of learning. The book provides a wide range of sources for the appropriateness and efficacy of a particular teaching method that is suitable for learners. The book is developed from significant findings from relevant literature reviews, the author's experience, and evidence from online resources and other publications. In this book, Westwood points out that because the current debates on methods of instruction are being conducted worldwide in educational psychology journals, it is not easy for busy teachers or classroom practitioners to access such information. It was mentioned that "understanding the rationales underpinning learner-centered and teacher-

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centered approaches is essential for guiding the selection of effective teaching methods for use in our classrooms" (Westwood, 2008, p. 2).

Book organization

This book is divided into seven chapters and a total of 40 subchapters. Chapter 1 explains the definition of 'teaching' and provides an overview of the debate between 'constructivism' and 'instructivism.' While Chapter 2 explores the important role of 'Direct Teaching Methods' in learning new information and establishing the basic skills required in the beginning stages, Chapter 3 focuses on 'Student-Centered Methods.' The teaching methods for different categories of students are discussed in Chapter 4, and 'Effective Teaching Strategies,' including key evidence from research on teacher effectiveness, are examined in Chapter 5. The following chapter, Chapter 6, presents the purposes of assessments and using assessment data to improve teaching. The last chapter of the book, Chapter 7, provides insights into 'Research-Based Methods' and the demand for using methods of instruction that have been validated by research.

Intended audience

The intended audience for the book is mainly teaching professionals and educational leaders. The book covers a wide range of topics related to teaching and learning theories, which are beneficial for teachers to refresh their skills and knowledge. In particular, it provides a good source for teacher trainees to explore and learn more about teaching methods. Because the book contains references to scholarly works, it can also be of interest to educators and researchers who want to extend their studies. The book may not be suitable for the general public, as its focus is on those with a background in teaching or education.

Analysis and significance

Chapter 1 starts with a clear definition of the term 'teaching,' which can be found in dictionaries. Teaching simply means giving instruction, and instruction generally means furnishing others with knowledge and information. This chapter highlights the differences between two theories, constructivism and instructivism. Constructivists believe that a student can create his or her own understanding of the world without predigested

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information and skills presented by a teacher and a textbook. In order to discover and process new information based on their needs, learners must be active in all aspects of their learning (Suhendi & Purwarno, 2018). On the other hand, instructivists believe that direct and explicit teaching is valuable for achieving certain goals in education. However, this theory upholds that knowledge flows unidirectionally from the instructor to the learners who must accept this knowledge without questioning or reasoning (Onyesolu et al., 2013). According to Ekanem (2013), students are often seen as banks where deposits are made by their teachers. They are taught based on the selected curriculum uncritically. The rest of this chapter discusses how these theories influence many areas of the school curriculum and teaching approaches. Overall, Chapter 1 serves as a great connection between the methods described in this chapter and their appropriateness for teaching particular types of subject matter in the following chapters of the book.

In Chapter 2, entitled 'Direct Teaching Methods: Suitability for Purpose,' the author emphasizes that a teaching method must be selected for its suitability in a given context. This means that one single method of teaching cannot suit all types of learning. For instance, direct teaching methods are advocated for the beginning stages of learning new information, skills, or strategies. Therefore, these methods must be appropriately used to achieve educational goals. This chapter provides evidence from many researchers who support direct teaching methods for establishing the basic skills required in the beginning stages of reading, spelling, writing, and elementary mathematics. According to Renau (2016), in language teaching methods, the direct method is done entirely in the target language since the mother tongue is not permitted. For example, vocabulary is taught through demonstration, and grammar rules are avoided. At the end of the chapter, the author points out that direct teaching is also the most effective way of presenting some procedural skills and subject matter like safety routines for handling equipment in laboratories and workshops, rules for games and sports events, key elements of driver education, and fire drills.

Chapter 3 mainly focuses on student-centered methods based on constructivist views of learning. These approaches have been named differently by their creators, for example, activity-based learning, guided discovery, inquiry approach, problem-based learning, project-based learning, and situated learning. However, the principles and practices associated with the methods

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are very similar. Although these approaches are highly appropriate for involving students more actively in acquiring knowledge, skills, and strategies, they are often concerned about the construction of knowledge and the development of effective learning strategies. According to Larasati (2018), student-centered learning emphasizes the role of the teacher as a facilitator and focuses on the needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles of students whose voices are acknowledged as central to their learning experience. Besides student-centered methods, the author also provides details and good examples of other learning approaches, such as inquiry-based methods, discovery learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning, resource-based learning, and computer-assisted learning.

The fourth chapter discusses the teaching methods that meet the learning needs of gifted students, students with learning difficulties, and students with physical, sensory, or intellectual disabilities. For young learners, early childhood practices respect and address individual differences among children, such as their readiness for different types of learning, their cultural backgrounds, their personalities, and their learning preferences. Therefore, teaching methods and curriculum content should be age-appropriate, socially and culturally appropriate, and individually appropriate. For gifted students, they often tend to be far ahead of their peers in their understanding, and their rate of learning presents a major challenge for any teacher. Inquiry and problem-based learning methods are highly suitable for these students. For students with learning difficulties, direct instructional methods have consistently proven to be the most effective approach. This chapter continues to distinguish different types of students with disabilities and suggests effective teaching methods to accommodate these students in their learning journey. The author argues that it is important for teachers to realize that a physical disability does not automatically impair a student's ability to learn. What all students with physical disabilities need most is improved access to the learning environment. It is essential to consider any modifications needed to seating, equipment, access routes, and the use of available technical support and resources in order to enhance the students' opportunities to participate.

In Chapter 5, there is research evidence of the key features of effective classroom teaching. For instance, to enhance students' learning and help them become more efficient learners, methods as well as curricula should be adapted

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to match students' abilities and needs. Teacher effectiveness is not concerned with any particular teaching method. Rather, it is concerned with the way teachers operate in their classrooms, such as the decisions they make, the actions they take, their interactions with students, their presentation skills, and the way they manage the group. This chapter shares five areas in which skilled teachers display their expertise. These areas include presenting and explaining subject matter and ideas, questioning students during lesson time, giving feedback, providing strategy training, and adapting or differentiating instruction.

Chapter 6 reviews different types of assessments, such as formative assessments, testing, teacher-made tests, norm-referenced tests, and diagnostic tests. Traditionally, assessment is used to inform students about their performances, and assessment data is seen as a reflection of students' abilities. According to Garfield (1994), the main purpose of assessment is to improve learning. Assessment enables teachers to obtain accurate information about their students' progress and their needs. Therefore, teachers should be aware of assessing what they believe is important for students to learn. Within this context, this chapter discusses the main functions of assessment to improve the quality of teaching. Assessment information not only facilitates accurate reporting to parents and to education authorities but also provides essential feedback to the teachers themselves on the quality of their instruction. High-quality assessment data can provide information about student learning needs as well as information for quality teaching improvement (Timperley, 2009). Timperley (2009) added that in order for teachers to be responsive to student learning needs, they should be given access to use and interpret assessment data.

In this last chapter, the author wonders why many teachers and some education authorities seem reluctant to adopt the types of teaching that produce the best results in terms of students' achievement. The reason is that they feel safe in their current way of teaching, and adopting new teaching methods may require more preparation and planning time. As a result, most teachers prefer to remain within their comfort zone rather than accept the challenge. However, Benzehaf (2016) has argued that because the teaching profession is complex and challenging, teachers must leave their comfort zones to develop the knowledge and skills they need to address students' learning difficulties. This chapter also

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mentions research-based teaching methods, which are in growing demand from several sectors of the education community in Australia and the United Kingdom. According to Dekker and Wolff (2016), the research-based teaching approach seems suitable for higher education practices, teaching through meaningful and hands-on experiences in research.

Conclusion

While the author tries to support his argument with numerous sources of data, mainly scholarly works, the book may be critiqued for its readability, especially for those readers with limited background in research. In addition, the use of language in this book, particularly the theoretical concepts, could be too advanced or specialized for readers who are not familiar with the related fields or disciplines. However, the writing style is clear and effective, and the book raises significant issues and topics for discussion, including meaningful explanations and examples from the author's experiences. Although the book covers a variety of content regarding teaching and learning, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential of school leadership because the tendency and philosophy of school leaders can impact the performance of teachers and the quality of education. This compact book may appear old, but it is gold. It is a short and informative book that contains a wide range of teaching methods and learning theories with supported evidence from reliable sources, which is helpful for teachers and educators to refresh their knowledge and skills. In addition, at the end of each chapter, the author provides useful links for self-exploration and further studies. For busy teachers who rarely attend refresher courses or have no access to educational psychology journals for new teaching methods or professional development, this book can serve as a useful source for improving the teaching profession, the effectiveness of teaching, and the quality of education. The book also emphasizes the importance of appropriately choosing teaching methods according to learners' needs and learning styles. To make teaching more effective, teachers should be provided with the opportunity to use the assessment data to interpret students' abilities and reflect on their instruction as well as their teaching performance. Being a teacher is not easy because this job is complex and challenging, especially in the 21st century of teaching and learning. Therefore, lifelong learning and professional development are crucial for all teachers and educators.

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