

Book Review

*Methods for Teaching:  
Promoting Student Learning*  
(Sixth Edition)

By David Jacobson, Paul Eggen, & Don Kauchak  
Merrill/Prentice Hall, 2002

**Reviewed by Joe Potts**

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This past year marked the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. Shortly after its publication in 1983, the polemical document re-energized conversations about the quality and nature of American education and, *de facto*, the quality and nature of the teaching that takes place in our public academies. A politically motivated indictment of schools, *A Nation at Risk* issued a clarion call for greater accountability and increased rigor in both teaching and learning. The nation was at risk, the argument went, and we all lived in peril.

Twenty years ago, the urgency of *A Nation at Risk* was not lost on teacher educators who saw in the politically-motivated argument an opportunity to address teacher education: How might teachers improve instruction to enhance student performance? How might we teach a diversity of children? How might we develop better assessments that promote life-long learning? These questions and others sparked dialogue about improving schools and there is some evidence that the conversation prompted, at least in California, a substantial analysis of the whats and hows of teacher education. Consider, for example, the outcomes of the *Ryan Act*—higher education's previous call to arms that supported separation of subject-matter from pedagogy.

Today teacher educators in California and elsewhere face another

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and perhaps more invasive mandate in the *No Child Left Behind* legislation that has school people scurrying to qualify teachers and secure federal dollars. Again we wonder: What in terms of knowledge and class-based performance represents a “quality teacher”? How might we document the dimensions of teaching performances? As teacher educators, how do we design methods courses that promote quality learning and teaching? Revised and in its sixth edition, *Methods for Teaching* written by David Jacobsen, Paul Eggen, and Donald Kauchak has a few ideas.

A general methods text assuming a cross-disciplinary audience of teachers-to-be, *Methods for Teaching* is organized, not surprisingly, into three thematic units, the first of which is *Learner-Centered Planning*. This section begins with a brief discussion of models for teaching in which the authors present a “three phase” approach, including (1) planning, (2) implementing, and (3) assessing. A discussion of national standards, goals and goal setting and reflective practice follows, as does a cursory discussion of constructivist theory. These compact discussions provide departure points for larger conversations about instructional strategies that hint at the authors’ constructivist theoretical leanings.

Chapters Two and Three focus on instructional goal setting. Chapter Two opens with general purposes and sources for setting instructional goals by delineating how new teachers might develop goals in traditional domains of thought. The third chapter distinguishes goals from objectives and pivots historically to detail educational perspectives that have influenced schools for decades. These are further applied to various classroom scenarios and made applicable with questions for discussion as well as suggestions for fieldwork. The unit continues with a discussion and examples of lesson planning, and chapter three offers a thorough explanation of critical thinking in the affective, cognitive, and psychomotor domains. Undoubtedly, a discussion of domains of thought will assist new teachers as they tease apart state standards in search of specific skills and strategies for instruction.

Chapter Six introduces the second unit and begins with teaching strategies for “student-centered learning.” Amongst these strategies are useful techniques for organizing and implementing class discussions, curiously brushed over in many methods textbooks. Whereas Chapter Six provides essential information about question formation and posing, the following chapters offer guidelines and examples of questioning techniques that place students, not teachers, in the center of the learning enterprise. Chapter Eight extends the learner-centered focus by including strategies for differentiating instruction to serve a diversity of students. One strategy touted here is the integration of technology. This discussion about technology is most timely and urgent, yet it feels a little

out of place carved up as the blocks of text appear more as snippets of material than as a rhetorically unified approach to integrating technologies in our curricula and instructional practices. The final two chapters extend the discussion of learner-centered instruction by describing classroom management solutions that focus on prevention through establishing a productive learning climate and the rules for acceptable behavior. Also included in the discussion of management are intervention techniques linked to theories of student behavior, including ideas for developing strong verbal and nonverbal strategies for shaping and directing students.

Not surprisingly, the authors discuss assessment at the conclusion of their text. The final chapter offers new teachers evaluation methodologies, including portfolios and rubrics that may be plugged into teaching units and lessons. With research and theory pointing to the importance of backward planning, however, and to the significance of thinking of assessment first and instruction second, the authors' discussion of evaluation begs the question: How might our goal setting, delineated in earlier chapters, lead new teachers to consider evaluation strategies that assist students to meet and even exceed goals or standards? Should classroom evaluation be conceptualized and practiced as formative as well as cumulative events? In other words, there is little connection here to the previous and cogent discussion of goal setting! Sadly, our new teachers develop the tendency to think of class-based evaluation—as well as goal setting—as tasks designed and completed only by the teacher. The linking of student-centered goal setting to progressive evaluative methods and reflective self-assessments could have provided more recursivity to this text, which would have added some unity to the entire discussion of teaching perspectives and methodologies.

One could argue that crises in education are omnipresent. Today, twenty-one years after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, our methods students sit in their education classes and hear about the educational crisis looming large. Will the methods texts, and our soon-to-be students who learn from the content they read, rise to the challenge to reduce the “danger” lurking in our curriculums and in our teaching? Will we really be able to train teachers so that schools leave no child behind? Maybe, and then again, let's hope so because statistics bear out a significant risk to our democracy: Over the next four years 1 million students, roughly 3500 per day, will drop out of public schools in search of something to occupy their time. Time they will have. Without skills and the promise of a better life ahead, it doesn't require windy calculations to determine what many kids will focus their attention on. In the face of desperate dropout rates and poor test scores, especially in urban and rural schools, all of us in education

must read broadly and listen closely as we develop our teaching methodologies and assess their educational utility. Perhaps it is in our methods texts and courses that we can indeed educate teachers who will evaluate individual children's educational needs, who will design engaging lessons, and who will effectively reduce the risk of leaving children behind.

*Methods for Teaching* offers a hopeful compendium of resources for helping teachers keep students and their learning in front. The book offers very practical strategies, but fails in its discussions of cutting-edge educational innovations. The text also desperately wants for an integrated theoretical framework that connects pedagogical philosophies with suggested teaching practices. Without theoretical guidance and without the skill for theoretical critique, our new teachers may unreflectively plug in one program or strategy after another wondering what the state or feds or the district office honchos will think of next. Moreover, the book is so packed with information that the reader may feel as though she is wandering in chapters without a compass to guide her. That criticism aside, the text contains fundamentals of teaching that will benefit those developing pedagogical skills in methods courses.