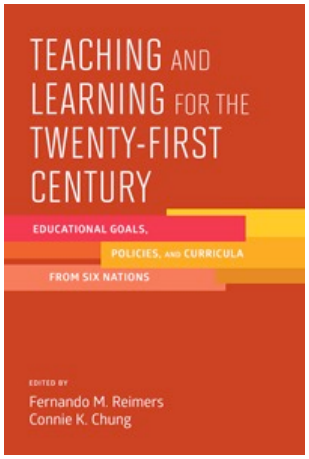


Teaching and Learning for the Twenty-First Century: Educational Goals, Policies, and Curricula from Six Nations

Reimers, Fernando M. and Chung, Connie K.
Harvard Education Publishing Group, 2016

Book Review

Tags: higher education | pedagogical goals | twenty-first century teaching and learning

Reviewed by: Dwight Hopkins
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This groundbreaking text does not approach teaching and learning from the do's and don'ts (the mechanics and tools of pedagogy) but instead offers a comparative cross-national investigation of the goals and purposes of education in Singapore, China, Chile, Mexico, India, and the United States. What has each country set as its goals and purposes for the twenty-first century context of close global interactions and rapid information and communication technologies? And how does each assess tangible outcomes? An overarching inter-country similarity is that the goals of pedagogy result from both changes in each country's contemporary particularity and in their evolving definitions of the global.

For instance, in the twenty-first century, each country faces fast and fluid developments signified by the necessity of learning to learn, of competency of certification, and of online learning. How should teaching and learning respond? Should a nation or civilization choose the route of achieving adaptability to evolving goals? Or should a country center on the technical challenges related to a school's function? Succinctly, goals mean who should learn what.

These goals are not neutral or objective. Various stakeholders in society are vying for the appropriate ways of teaching and learning. Governments seek pedagogical goals that produce patriotic citizens; businesses want ideal employees; faith communities desire moral human beings; graduate schools look for highly educated applicants; not-for-profits hope for volunteer-minded people; and parents seek teaching and learning so their children can achieve meaningful employment or, in some case, simply employment.

Drawing on a sophisticated and comprehensive study from the National Research Council (NRC), this book frames each of the six countries within three broad pedagogical rubrics – cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal competencies – that are learned by both teachers and students. Each generic rubric contains relevant subsections. Specifically, cognitive competencies include cognitive processes and strategies, knowledge, and creativity; intrapersonal competencies include intellectual openness, work ethic/conscientiousness, and positive core self-evaluation; and interpersonal competencies include teamwork and collaboration along with leadership development. How does each country implement in practical concretes this NRC framework?

The co-editors chose the NRC study because, in their research, it represents the most all-encompassing and science-based study of twenty-first century skills when compared to the other major studies in the world. The NRC readily admits that many aims within its teaching and learning investigations are not novel. But what is new (and is fundamentally different from all prior historical contexts) is that these sought-after competencies no longer belong to the elites of the world (including the United States). All countries now de jure or at least subscribe to a democratization of pedagogical goals for a diversity of citizens. Indeed, a vibrant twenty-first century country requires universal goals for each citizen.

After an elaborate and nuanced review of the six countries, the book offers a concluding chapter with the following recommendation. Each nation necessitates a systems theory to integrate all aspects of a country's goals, methods, practices, and assessment mechanisms to achieve the established competencies. The best system will be one that connects fluid, adaptable, logical, and coherent relationships among curricula, school organization and management, various teaching and learning approaches (such as independent study, didactic pedagogy, outdoor education, and project-based learning), effective communication mechanisms, and emotional buy-in from society's stakeholders.

I highly recommend this book for any civic-minded people, especially those wanting to achieve professional development for teachers and to prepare students for new ways of learning now.

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