Facilitating Seven Ways of Learning: A Resource for More Purposeful, Effective, and Enjoyable College Teaching

Davis, James R.; and Arend, Bridget D.
Stylus Publishing, Llc., 2013

Book Review

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Two university educators who have led campus teaching and learning centers and worked as academic administrators have served us all well with their *Facilitating Seven Ways of Learning*. Davis and Arend seek explicitly to connect teaching practices to specific learning goals chosen for university classes. Not only do I recommend this book to you, but I will use it in my January PhD Teaching Seminar.

At times the language of the book is a bit grand, talking about being "trapped" in a "lecture paradigm" with an "obsolete" view of learning (5, 8). They claim "confusion reigns as the paradigm crumbles (15)." I forgive them, for it does not continue too long. Perhaps the assumption was that a grand view was necessary to sell books to skeptical readers. Nevertheless, the book delivers what it promises: to help faculty, trained as scholars, researchers, and writers, to focus additionally on being effective teachers concerned about learning – for citizenship, personal development, and the ongoing generation of knowledge.

Conversation about teaching is increasing in graduate schools, professional schools, and universities. At a recent consultation, I heard faculty members talk among themselves about how they trusted their colleagues, knew that individual classes were faithful and effective, and yet were concerned that their overall curricular goal for critical, integrative practical theological wisdom was not occurring. One mentioned that they all worked hard at fulfilling goals for individual classes, but had not attended to specific integrative commitments of their curriculum together. *Facilitating Seven Ways of Learning* is a way to begin addressing that concern.

After assisting faculty to define course learning goals, the authors take seven explicit learning commitments and demonstrate effective pedagogical practices. The seven ways of learning are: building skills; acquiring knowledge; developing critical, creative, and dialogical thinking; cultivating problem-solving and decision-making abilities; exploring attitudes, feelings, and perspectives; practicing professional judgment; and reflecting on experience. One can see the influence of Bloom and Shulman here. The authors help faculty clarify how learning goals connect with these seven ways of learning and offer concrete strategies for teaching. To quibble: I am not certain that simply reflecting on experience is a goal. Is it not more a learning strategy for professional judgment, acquiring knowledge, or practicing decision-making skills? Regardless, this book will generate conversation among faculty members and will assist them to make the move from learning commitments to classroom strategies.

As mentioned, I will use this book in my next PhD teaching seminar. Faculty are committed to assisting doctoral students to consider the vocation of teaching, connect academic study with teaching, and gain practical skill in course design and teaching practices. I have brought together bibliographies on theological education, course design, and learning strategies that I routinely share with graduate students. With *Facilitating Seven Ways of Learning,* students can practice naming commitments of their disciplines and their own scholarship, explore the learning goals they have for their students, dialogue with faculty mentors about the particular concerns of classes, and connect teaching practices to learning commitments. Clearly this book was written after years of experience in a college teaching center, empowering faculty colleagues. I recommend it.

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