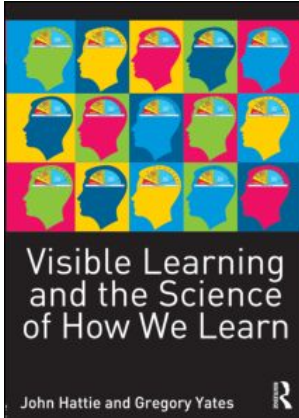




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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn

Hattie, John; and Yates, Gregory
Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014

Book Review

Tags: effective teaching | learning theories | pedagogical theories

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Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn is an accessible volume that reinforces the concept of “visible learning” previously presented in Hattie’s 2009 *Visible Learning* (VLT) with supporting research and interpretations from the fields of education, sociology, and neuroscience. While some of the supporting research is new, the authors also harken to longstanding, now standard, studies on various topics. The writing is concise (most of the 31 chapters are about six pages) and the organization of the book allows it to be used as a compendium on topics related to learning and teaching.

The book is organized using nine overarching principles that connect learning theory and teaching under three main sections: (1) learning within classrooms, (2) selected topics in learning theory, and (3) a theme of “know thyself” (self-esteem, competence, self-knowledge, and metacognition). Along the way Hattie and Yates address trendy but dubious ideas in education, such as learning styles, multitasking, and uncritical ideas about instructional technology and the Internet.

This volume is among those that make the shift from a focus on the teacher and on the act of teaching, to the learner, the processes whereby learning actually happens, and impediments to learning. The working assumption is “achievement in schools is maximized when teachers see learning through the eyes of students, and when students see learning through the eyes of themselves as teachers” (xi). The value in this perspective is helping teachers understand the experience of learning on the part of the learner. Understanding and appreciating what goes on “inside the head of the learner,” can help instructors make learning “visible.” This means that teachers can design learning experiences to match how students actually learn, not how they may assume their students learn. The goal is to help teachers act with informed intention.

While there is not much new in terms of learning theory, the book has value to theological educators in several regards. First, it is a good primer on pedagogy and current research on learning for instructors who do not have a background in learning theory. Second, the book provides motivational reinforcement for the importance of making the switch from teacher-focused instruction to student-centered learning. The book does so in a balanced manner, citing supportive research for both the importance of the teacher's role and behavior in the classroom (effective use of direct instruction, the role of feedback, and so forth) and the necessity of focusing on student attention and engagement in the process of learning (cognitive load, attention, memory, motivation, and how knowledge and skills are acquired by learners). Third, several chapters touch on issues of concern particularly important to the theological and religious studies contexts. For example, Chapter 4 deals with the personality of the teacher and trust; Chapter 21 explores research and myths about students as "digital natives" and the impact of instructional technology and the Internet (Chapter 22 is titled, "Is the Internet turning us into shallow thinkers?"). Part 3, Know Thyself, focuses on the affective dynamics of teaching and learning, an issue which is consistently undervalued but is critical to matters of belief, faith, and self-understanding (formation).

This is a worthwhile and useful volume. It covers the field of what makes teachers effective in the classroom. Its strength is in (1) making often complex concepts accessible in both writing and the format of the book; (2) providing balanced, research-informed coverage of concepts related to the complex acts of teaching and learning, and (3) helping teachers and instructors make the shift from over-focusing on the teaching act to appreciation and understanding of the process of learning as experienced by students.

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