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Book review of *Teaching Well. Understanding Key Dynamics of Learning-Centered Classrooms*

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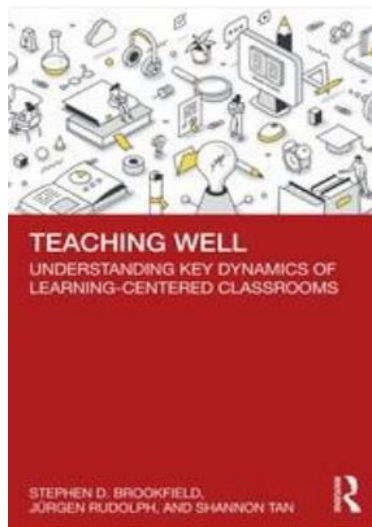
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Abstract

This is a review of *Teaching Well. Understanding Key Dynamics of Learning-Centered Classrooms*, by Stephen D. Brookfield, Jürgen Rudolph, and Shannon Tan (New York and London: Routledge, 2024).

Keywords

Learning, Teaching, learning-centered teaching, classroom, students, democratization of the classroom.



Brookfield, S. D., Rudolph, J. & Tan, S. (2024). *Teaching Well. Understanding Key Dynamics of Learning-Centered Classrooms*. New York and London: Routledge. ISBN: 978-1-642-67472-9 (hbk)
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What does it mean to teach well? This is the essential question that is asked today in the age of technology, when students are attracted by technology, spend more time with technology and social media, interact and communicate, while technology has become an important component in education. The authors Stephen D. Brookfield, Jürgen Rudolph, and Shannon Tan give a very simple, concrete, and practical answer to this question: it means "being willing to do anything that helps students learn" (Brookfield, Rudolph & Tan, 2024, p. viii).

Teaching Well - Understanding Key Dynamics of Learning-Centered Classrooms is not like a typical book addressing the modern dynamics of learning and teaching. It is special because once you start reading, you cannot stop until you finish it. This unique quality stems from the book's structure, the questions it poses, and the answers it provides. Starting with the answers, they are presented by Stephen D. Brookfield, a distinguished scholar at Antioch University, Adjunct Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, and Professor Emeritus at the University of St. Thomas, USA. The questions are masterfully crafted by Professor Jürgen Rudolph, a German educator and journal editor with over half a lifetime spent in Singapore. He serves as the Co-Editor in Chief of the Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching and holds the position of Director of Research at Kaplan Singapore. Shannon Tan, the Journal Manager of the Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching and Research Executive at Kaplan Singapore, also contributes to the thought-provoking inquiries. As for the book's enticing structure, each chapter revolves around a specific main question. They are as follows:

- What does it mean to teach well?
- How do our experiences as students frame our teaching?
- How do we do learning-centered teaching?
- How do we deal with classroom and self-sabotage?
- How does power show up in classrooms?
- How do we democratize classrooms?
- How can we promote good discussion?
- How do we get students to think more critically?
- How do we teach about race?

- How can we become critically reflective teachers?
- How can we enact the power of modeling?
- How do we teach well as leaders?
- How do we learn and grow as teachers over a career?

This book explores, in a practical and concrete manner, the fundamental dynamics of a learning-centered classroom. Learner-centeredness emphasizes the uniqueness of each learner, recognizing varying interests, needs, challenges, and abilities (Archambault et al., 2022). It aims to address specific needs by offering learners choices in the sequence, topics, and tasks of instructional activities (McCombs, 2015). Teachers adopting a learner-centered approach hold lofty expectations for all students, meticulously attending to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes each student brings into the classroom (An & Reigeluth, 2011). Numerous empirical studies have delved into the connection between teacher support and student achievement (Tao et al., 2022), as motivation, facilitation, simplification, orientation, and the decomposition of complex problems also hinge on this relationship.

Another pivotal challenge associated with effective teaching in today's world is the democratization of the classroom. This concept entails fostering a collaborative environment where students have the freedom to make choices, express themselves, and contribute their opinions, all while being actively encouraged by teachers (Pane, 2010). A proficient teacher adeptly manages such an environment, guiding students to align with the curriculum while promoting inclusivity. Within this democratized classroom, students can engage in critical thinking, voicing doubts until persuaded by a logical argument. Central to this democratization is the facilitation of discussions, a key aspect that requires careful preparation and skillful management (Brookfield, Rudolph & Tan, 2024). As emphasized, the outcome of these discussions can be 'wonderful or terrible' depending on the preparation and management involved (p. 95).

Hence, the teacher assumes the role of guiding discussions in alignment with the set goals and the existing knowledge base of the students. The interplay between teacher support, student engagement, and academic achievement holds paramount significance in the realm of quality teaching (Lei, Cui & Zhou, 2018). A well-executed class discussion is deemed effective when it stimulates a particular form of learning. This stimulation can be facilitated through various means, such as incorporating YouTube videos or fostering discussions akin to those led by a TV moderator. According to the authors, these approaches can effectively encourage students to engage in critical thinking, involving three types of

assumptions – paradigmatic, prescriptive, and causal (Brookfield, Rudolph & Tan, 2024).

The book, through its comprehensive questions and sub-questions, addresses a myriad of crucial issues, providing practical and insightful answers. It serves as an invaluable guide for those aspiring to become proficient educators. However, it is worth noting that the book's only flaw lies in its captivating nature, which may disrupt the reader's plans if they've allocated time for other activities. Once picked up for reading, it becomes a compelling force, making it challenging for the reader to set it aside until every page has been explored.

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