

Journal of Applied Christian Leadership

Volume 5 | Number 2

Article 8

2011

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Recommended Citation

Rodriguez, Raquel (2011) "How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching [review] / Susan A. Ambrose, Michael W. Bridges, Marsha C. Lovett, Michele DiPietro, and Marie K. Norman," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 5: No. 2, 106-107.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol5/iss2/8>

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BOOK REVIEWS

HOW LEARNING WORKS: SEVEN RESEARCH-BASED PRINCIPLES FOR SMART TEACHING

*By Susan A. Ambrose, Michael W. Bridges, Marsha C. Lovett, Michele DiPietro, & Marie K. Norman
San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass (2010)
Hardcover, 336 pages
Reviewed by RAQUEL RODRIGUEZ*

How Learning Works, in the words of the authors, “grew out of over twenty-nine years of experience consulting with faculty colleagues about teaching and learning” (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 2). It is a major contribution to the field and practice of education because it provides a synthesis of experience and reflection on the successes and problems in the process of education noted in discussions with thousands of educators worldwide, and in a great variety of disciplines, institutions, and cultures. The authors have focused on seven basic learning principles which students employ and which teachers can utilize to improve the learning experience for their students. The book’s main purpose is to provide “a bridge between research and practice,

between teaching and learning” for instructors at all levels of teaching (p. 2). Its aim, then, is to help teachers get a better understanding of the learning process so that they can communicate their lessons more effectively. While a book about learning may seem irrelevant to leaders who are not educators, one must remember that leaders are in many respects teachers of those they lead.

Learning, say the authors, is defined as “a process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning” (p. 3). They have taken the perspective that learning involves both developmental processes that are occurring in the student’s life, and the holistic context which includes not only skills and knowledge, but also social and emotional experiences that influence their values and their self-perception.

The book consists of two parts. While the main body of the text presents the theoretical basis of both learning and instructional science by discussing the seven principles of learning in detail, the eight appendices provide concrete examples of how the teacher puts the learning principles into practice, and shows how the concept of maps, rubrics, exam wrappers, checklists, and other devices can be used in the classroom.

The authors have distilled the seven learning principles from research in a variety of disciplines, dedicating one chapter to each principle. These principles are outlined in the book’s introduction:

1. Students’ prior knowledge can help or hinder learning.
2. How students organize knowledge influences how they learn and apply what they know.
3. Students’ motivation determines, directs, and sustains what they do to learn.

4. To develop mastery, students must acquire component skills, practice integrating them, and know when to apply what they have learned.
5. Goal-directed practice coupled with targeted feedback enhances the quality of students' learning.
6. Students' current level of development interacts with the social, emotional, and intellectual climate of the course to impact learning.
7. To become self-directed learners, students must learn to monitor and adjust their approaches to learning. (pp. 4-6)

The seven principles are presented in an intuitively sequential pattern that allows the reader to connect each principle to the one that precedes and follows it. This pattern contributes to and facilitates the metacognitive work that allows an instructor to self-assess and adjust teaching behavior to fit an effective and proven process of teaching and learning. In addition, the psychological context of learning is addressed in four of the seven principles which recognize the student as a person with variable attitudes and experiences that impact the effectiveness of teaching and learning. This creates a holistic model wherein teaching and learning become a relational transaction that recognizes variables in both instructor and learner with interactions that affect each.

The authors identify their intended audience as "faculty members, graduate students, faculty developers, instructional designers and librarians." They add that "it also includes K-12 educators" (p. 12). But this classroom-centered focus ignores the fact that teaching and learning is a part of nearly all of the various facets of life, particularly in the work environment. Therefore, it should be recognized that effective teaching and learning strategies are elemental realities in

leadership processes. These learning principles are important not only to leaders in educational institutions, but also those in churches, businesses, or other organizations. The need for effective teaching and learning is ubiquitous.

The authors of *How Learning Works* have produced an excellent research work. Generally well laid out and easy to read, the book is an excellent text with very good guiding principles to assist the teacher in effective learning strategies. The book is a good read for any beginning college instructor, for parents who are interested in how their children learn, and certainly for leaders who are interested in developing the people who serve their organizations. It's for those who identify with the following statement: "based on years of study and work, you are an expert in your field—but you are certainly not an expert in how to teach others about your field" (p. xiv). *How Learning Works* fills gaps that many professionals face on the journey to becoming an effective developer of those they lead.

RAQUEL RODRIGUEZ is a graduate student at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and is a member of the 2011 International In-Residence Leadership Cohort in the Doctor of Ministry Program. She is a citizen of the Dominican Republic.

LEADING GOD'S PEOPLE: WISDOM FROM THE EARLY CHURCH FOR TODAY

By Christopher A. Beeley
Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (2012)
Paperback, 149 pages
Reviewed by STANLEY E.
PATTERSON

Christopher Beeley, an experienced Anglican theologian and pastor, expresses the purpose of *Leading*