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BOOK REVIEWS

Teaching Actively: Eight Steps and 32 Strategies to Spark Learning in Any Classroom, by Mel Silberman. Published by Pearson Education, Boston, MA, 2006 (148 pages).

Dr. Mel Silberman is Professor Emeritus of Psychological Studies in Education at Temple University, Pennsylvania where he received the “Great Teacher” award. He is a graduate of Brandeis University and holds a Ph.D. in educational psychology from the University of Chicago. Dr. Silberman has authored over a dozen books, most of which are on active learning, an area in which he is internationally known. *Teaching Actively* is a follow-up to his best-selling book *Active Learning: 101 Strategies to Teach Any Subject* and is intended to “spark and guide” (p. vii) the learning of students from elementary to tertiary levels, with ideas derived from his own teaching experiences of over 35 years.

As one turns the attractive cover and glances at the table of contents, the feeling that comes is similar to that of browsing through a restaurant menu of attractive dishes. The cuisine presented here is meant for the consumption of teachers who want to make students excited about learning. The book’s eight sections present a pedagogically organized sequence of teaching strategies. The suggestions range from strategies used when beginning a course or class to suggestions that help to bring closure to learning experiences. Each of the steps comes with three to five specific strategies that foster its application.

In section one, “Engage Your Students from the Start,” Silberman presents four groups of strategies that foster a conducive learning climate from the very beginning of your class. Besides the typical social icebreakers, he suggests several “learning” icebreakers (p. 6) and activities that facilitate immediate involvement in learning such as Pre-discussion, “New” participant rule, and “Call on the next speaker” format.

Sections two to four present strategies that foster learning by maximizing student understanding and retention, structuring student discussions for participation, in-depth dialogue, and motivating students to ask thought-provoking questions. Especially noteworthy here are the five strategies in

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section three that one can use to “obtain lively *and* focused discussions, time after time” (p. 37). These five strategies are: (1) Engage students before plunging into discussion, (2) State effective questions for discussion, (3) Improve the quality of discussion through student preparation, (4) Match the discussion format to the situation, and (5) Facilitate the flow of conversation.

A variety of ways of doing collaborative learning are discussed in section five. Most valuable among the strategies presented are the creation of study groups, jigsaw learning, and holding learning tournaments. Section six suggests several learning-by-doing activities such as “being in someone else’s shoes,” (p. 97) and whole-class role-playing.

How to incorporate technology wisely for active learning is the focus of the seventh section. Whether your computer facilities are limited or adequate, the strategies suggested here are helpful in making good use of technology in the classroom. Suggestions include a range of activities from utilizing webquests to more sustained computer activities. This section also includes valuable ideas on collaboration through technology where students learn to share information with fellow classmates, and with students in other schools.

The eighth and final section of the book is entitled “Make the End Unforgettable.” The strategies suggested help students remember what they have learned, at the same time, help them “feel what they have learned has been special” (p. 123). Noteworthy are strategies that help students create a plan of action for future learning and ways to celebrate learning at the end of a unit, or course of study. Silberman concludes by giving a final piece of advice, telling readers that they can make a difference if they are willing to “Want it, Learn it, Try it, and Live it” (p. 143).

This book is valuable for teachers of any level and any subject. Pre-service and in-service trainers of teachers would also find several unique mini strategies to share. The ready-to use strategies are presented in a teacher-friendly manner and are easy to follow. The book includes worksheets that help utilize the strategies found in each of the eight steps. The organization of the book helps in selecting the strategies that you find most suitable for a particular teaching purpose.

The book is printed in a large 8 ½” x 11” size format. It has an appealing layout, with a good-size font that makes the book easy to read.

Like a recipe book in the hand of a chef, *Teaching Actively* will find its place in the hands of a teacher who wishes to bolster student learning. This book is one that will not necessarily be read cover to cover in one sitting. However, there is continuity of thought as the eight-step plan is elucidated in a sequence, and illustrated with many ready-to-use ideas for teaching.

I have personally experimented with several of these strategies in my tertiary level classes, and feel very satisfied with the outcomes. The one dilemma you may face with the content of this book is choosing—Silberman offers you 32 strategies, all of which you may want to try!

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The Theory of Money and Banking in Modern Times by Macleans Mzumara.
Tate Publishing: Mustang OK, 2006 (312 pages).

Macleans Mzumara, an experienced professor, economist, financial advisor and consultant, has written *The Theory of Money and Banking in Modern Times* with the purpose of adding knowledge in the areas of money and money management for business and economics students, teachers, financial advisors and counselors, and other interested parties. This text covers a wide range of topics such as theories of money, theories of business cycles, financial markets, inflation and employment, central banking, commercial banking, international banking, international trade, the IS-LM model, aggregate demand-aggregate supply, money laundering, external sources of funds, the Euro, and money and poverty. The book has been written in simple and clear language in order to enable even readers without extensive language skills to understand the principles.

The book could be divided into three interrelated parts: money and theories explaining the concept of money; circulation of money by banking systems, financial markets and other financial institutions; and the application of financial/monetary theories to solve the problems of inflation, unemployment, and poverty.

First, Mzumara stated that money, universally accepted as a medium of exchange, replaced the barter system of olden times. It was first introduced as ‘full bodied’ money (gold, silver, and other precious metals) and was gradually reduced to what we know today as ‘fiat’ money, or paper money. Mzumara then highlighted Thomas Gresham’s law of money that says, “Bad money drives out good money” (2006, p. 29). He said that the law has remained valid up to today because once money was made of gold and silver, but it has now been reduced to paper money. Money has lost its physical value.

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Second, Mzumara included in his book the important functions of the central bank, commercial banks, and other financial institutions that serve as means to circulate money to the people for the purpose of making possible the activities relating to money. The central bank, or reserve bank, is the premier bank of a country, and is entrusted with the authority to manage the money supply and to make monetary policy. Commercial banks are the ones dealing directly with the clients regarding receiving deposits and granting short-term and long-term loans. The functions of commercial banks are governed by the banking act of the country. The authority to issue money is given only to the central bank. Commercial banks cannot issue money because if they had the authority to issue money, it would be very difficult to control inflation and price stability.

Third, the book highlighted some major economic problems like inflation, unemployment, and poverty. Inflation is the general increase in price when all the prices of commodities and services increase, showing an upward trend. The book mentions the causes of inflation and the remedies, including changing the central bank monetary policy, to reduce inflation. If the problem of inflation is not handled effectively, people will lose confidence in the domestic currency. Unemployment is another major problem in both developed and developing countries, but it is more serious in developing countries. It can be as high as 80 percent of the total population in some countries. "Can full employment be attained?" is the universal question asked in this book. Mzumara's answer may interests the reader. The book advises some ways of eliminating the problem, and suggests that the monetary policy made by the central bank should target solutions to this problem.

In the final chapter of the book, Mzumara talks about the problem of poverty and the role of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and other financial institutions in eradicating poverty. He claims that there is no universal definition of poverty. People considered poor in developed countries may be well-to-do in the developing countries. Therefore the concept of a "poverty datum line" detailed in this book classifies the differences between the poor and the "not poor" (p. 274). The families below the datum line are considered to be poor and the families above this line are considered not poor. The book gives some causes of poverty and suggests a range of remedies to help eradicate the problem.

The author acknowledges the increase in sophistication in the system of banking due to the advancement of technology. He contends that in the future, the banking system will become increasingly complex to meet the sophisticated needs of the customers. For example, the use of "automated teller machine (ATM) will be outdated in favor of the use of the same technology like the mobile phone system" (p. 238).

I believe readers will find this book interesting, full of useful information, and easy to understand. But read it soon—while the information is still fresh—before it becomes outdated due to the rapid changes in society that it describes.

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