Learning to Teach

Dr. Mark Anthony Cenas Pa-alisbo
Lecturer, Faculty of Education / Master of Education International Program
St. Theresa International College, Thailand.
Email: paalisbo.mark07@gmail.com / markanthonypaalisbo@yahoo.com

This article reviews the book entitled, Learning to Teach, Ninth Edition published by McGraw-Hill in 2012. There were also previous editions in 2009, 2007 and 2004. Its author is Richard Arends, a Professor of Educational Leadership and Dean Emeritus at Central Connecticut State University, where he served as Dean of the School Education and Interim Provost of Academic Affairs from 1991 to 2004. He is a former elementary, middle school, and high school teacher. His special interests are teaching, teacher education, organization development and school improvement.

This material is intended for but not limited to student-teachers taking up a variety of course titles such as Analysis of Teaching, Study of Teaching, Principles and Practices of Teaching, Strategies of Teaching, or Learning Management. The course’s content mainly focuses on general models, strategies and tactics that are related with teaching different grade levels across subject areas. The ninth edition of this text significantly lays down teaching pedagogies that teachers could adapt in their everyday teaching. Learning to become a teacher is a complex journey full of successes and challenges. It initiates with a lot of experiences from the internal and external stakeholders. The contents of the book run through 588 pages, complimented by Author index and Subject index. It is divided into five parts and these parts are further sectioned into 14 chapters. Each chapter is concluded by reflections from the classroom, summary of the key points and terms, interactive and applied learning, portfolio and field experience activities, and supplemental reading materials for the academic professionals.

Part 1 comprises of two chapters and discusses the concepts of teaching and learning in today’s classrooms. Generally, this section is about the teachers and teaching, students and learning. Chapter 1 outlines the overall perspective on the purposes and conceptions of effective teaching. It implies that effective teachers use research as part of their best practices to improve teaching-learning process and elevate quality of student achievement. Chapter 2 describes the student learning in diverse classrooms. It examines the opportunities and challenges of individual
differences in the learning environment. Differences in race, culture, ethnicity, religion, language, and gender are also discussed in some details. This portion informs teachers of the different strategies and interventions of establishing inclusive classrooms for learners.

Part 2 presents the leadership aspects of teaching. Educational leaders and teachers should be able to provide leadership to students and to collaborate effectively and work interdependently to showcase a variety of activities and accomplish the academic and social targets of education. This section is also centered on five important leadership functions such as planning, motivating students, building productive learning communities, managing classroom groups, and assessing and evaluating student progress. Chapter 3 dominates on teacher planning. It includes the different perspectives on planning and its significance. Chapter 4 discusses the setting conditions for allocating timeframe, determining motivation, and building productive learning communities. Chapter 5 focuses on the principles of classroom management which is also a very crucial task for teachers. Further, Chapter 6 revolves around the issues and philosophies of assessment and evaluation. This is also an essential element in instructional planning and delivery in order to measure desired competencies and learning outcomes of students.

Part 3 presents the overview of teacher-centered transmission models of teaching. The first three instructional models or approaches are presented in this portion such as Presenting and Explaining, Direct Instruction and Concept and Inquiry-Based Teaching. The different approaches described in this part are considered as teaching models, teaching strategies, teaching methods or teaching approaches. Although these concepts share similar characteristics but they have various implications. Chapter 7 discusses the techniques and strategies on teaching using the method of presenting and explaining. Chapter 8 explains the principles and methods of direct instruction. This chapter espouses the philosophies of behavioral and social cognitive theories. The author also presents the process of conducting direct instruction lessons. On the other hand, Chapter 9 focuses on the principles and techniques of concept and inquiry-based teaching. It describes the nature of concepts, human development and concept learning, planning for concept teaching, and conducting concept lessons. In this section, the principles and practices of inquiry-based teaching is also explained comprehensively. Essential topics on the process of developing classrooms with cultures of thinking, making thinking more visible, using thinking routines, and developing learning environments that promote thinking.
Generally, these models of teaching are more traditional and teacher-centered in nature.

Part 4 of the book revolves around the student-centered constructivist models of teaching. The three student-centered teaching models are presented in the next three chapters of this section. These models show different set of assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning. They convey philosophical perspectives of John Dewey and other progressive educators and researchers. These are often referred to as constructivist perspectives of the teaching-learning process. These student-centered models are cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and classroom discussion. Some of their features are the same but there are distinctions in terms of characteristics, processes and techniques. This part significantly describes the theoretical foundations, teachers’ roles, students’ roles, planning tasks, learning environments, and assessment procedures of the mentioned models. Chapter 10 concentrates deeply on the nature of cooperative learning in the four corners of the classroom. It defines the concept of the democratic classroom, intergroup relations and experiential learning. Learning aims to get the students engaged in the different classroom-based tasks and activities. It also discusses some of the positive effects of cooperative learning on cooperative behavior and academic achievement. Moreover, different approaches of this model are also described such as Student Teams Achievement Divisions (STAD), jigsaw, group investigation, and structural approach. On the other hand, Chapter 11 is about problem-based learning (PBL) and its importance in developing higher-level thinking skills considering various problem-oriented situations and learning how to learn. This section also presents the main essence of problem-based learning which involves the presentation of authentic and meaningful situations that serves as foundations for student investigation and inquiry. It delves further on the special features of this learning model. In addition, this chapter includes the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings for problem-based learning such as the cognitive-constructivist perspective of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Discovery learning, developed by Jerome Bruner, is another teaching model that put emphasis on the significance of assisting learners to understand the key ideas of a discipline, the need for active student engagement, and principle of true origin of learning through personal discovery. Chapter 12 focuses on classroom discussion in its entirety. This is a specific teaching model that can be used by itself or across several models. It espouses on the overview of classroom discussion, its theoretical and empirical support, nature of discourse and cognition, principles of classroom discourse patterns, teachers’ art of questioning, and concept of wait-time. Like other chapters, the processes of planning and conducting this type of model are also
discussed. Various approaches in applying this teaching model are also explained such as recitations, inquiry or problem-based discussion, and sharing-based discussion. Chapter 13 expounds the definition and significance of connecting and using multiple models and differentiating instruction. Further, it describes the process of using multiple models of teaching to achieve specific learning goals and targets and meet students’ needs and interests. This chapter also explains the rationale, major features, and strategies that support differentiated instruction. Lastly, a very clear description of how to implement a learning environment which is conducive to different kinds of learners is also provided.

Part 5 of this book is allocated exclusively for the organizational aspects of teaching. This section insinuates that teachers are expected to perform not only their primary responsibilities but also to provide school leadership in general. This specifically means that teachers should work collaboratively with school’s stakeholders such as administrators, colleagues, parents, students and community members. Chapter 14 puts emphasis on school leadership and collaboration. This involves the four expectations for teachers such as understanding schools as social organizations, providing leadership and working collaboratively with community members, helping schools improve, and continuous professional development. In order to perform these functions effectively, teachers should understand the nature of the school as a learning environment where administrators, teachers, and students work hand in hand. Teachers also need organizational skills for the school to become productive. Furthermore, this chapter also describes the ideas of schools as social organizations, features of schools as unique organizations, teachers’ work, features of effective schools, theoretical foundations behind schools, and workplace skills required of teachers, and processes of teachers’ active involvement towards school improvement for different kinds of learners.

Another section is allocated for a resource handbook which comprises two handbooks. The first handbook is about reading and using research. It describes the basic features of research such as research questions and problems, model for research on teaching, independent and dependent variables. Moreover, educational researchers utilize different approaches to investigate problems related to teaching and learning. This section also presents the assumptions about scientific knowledge, types of research studies, and statistical concepts and research conventions. Some useful pieces of information on reading and keeping abreast of research are also espoused in this corner. On the other hand, the second handbook entitled, Using Learning to Teach to
Prepare for the PRAXIS II: Principles of Learning and Teaching Exam. This handbook is intended to help students prepare for the said examination. However, this will be useful for teachers to check on the students’ quality of understanding on the different topics covered. Glossary of important key terms and concepts are also provided on the last section of the book.

In general, this book showcases best practices that teachers could apply in their actual teaching experiences. This will help them value the needs of the students and the models appropriate for the achievement of learning goals and objectives. It is also necessary to integrate research to teaching and learning for the application of practical problems encountered by educators. Learning to teach is an ideal reference for teachers who want to learn the evidence-based and applied and practical side of teaching. This is a tool for effective teaching and learning practices in the 21st Century academic environment. Thinking how to think, teaching how to think, learning how to learn, teaching how to learn, and LEARNING TO TEACH are significant elements for successful and meaningful educational practices in the digital age.