“Sometimes you can’t judge a book by its cover.” Or its title?

Neither the title, nor the publisher’s summary, will prepare the reader for the deep analysis and introspection this book draws from the reader. Like an expert guide through the dense tropical forests, Stevick leads us on a passage into areas of learning and the processes of the mind that most of us thought were far too challenging for the average casual investigator. As series editor Donald Freeman points out in his preface, “The TeacherSource series offers you a point of view. . . . Each author . . . has to lay out what he or she believes is central to the topic, and how he or she has come to that understanding.” It would be a nice overview of teaching methodologies and the attitudes behind them, similar to other teacher’s reference series. Not hardly.

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author’s prologue begins, with a history of Stevick’s interest in the fields of memory and cognition. As we enter the text itself. In fact, this book is not about teaching methods (Stevick discusses Community Language Learning, the Silent Way, and Suggestopedia) but about the language learning process, and the fresh approach offers language teachers. Stevick describes his goal as “neither to expound nor to promote the methods,” nor “to offer a comprehensive treatment of methodology,” but rather “to identify which ‘awarenesses, and the awarenesses of awarenesses,’ I now bring to my reactions of any approach or method” (p. 3).

As many great books, What’s at Stake? is a slow starter. The first four chapters are fundamental building blocks for the focus of the later chapters, but for those with little background (or interest) in studies of the mind’s processes “what happens between” language learners, memory (one of Stevick’s focal areas of research), “denial of death” (p. 19), a “world of meaningful action” (p. 20), and “the divided self” (with Gallwey) (p. 24) can be a disheartening detour from what has been supposed is the true objective.

A specific area of concern for Stevick is “clutter on the worktable” (p. 23). By this he refers to memory, particularly psychological affectors. His description of working memory includes between it and short term and long term memory, but in “computer-talk” we might describe it as “human RAM-memory.” He shows in later chapters how each of these three ELT methods describe and deal with “clutter.”

Stevick’s stance on teaching is certainly thought provoking, as he suggests that much of the energy towards learner-centered teaching misses the mark. “We may continue to affirm that the learner is in some ways ‘central’ to what we do. But we should at the same time remember that there are functions for which our society, and our students themselves, demand that we the teachers stand steadfast at the center of language education” (p. 30). He then points out five teacher functions, all key elements to his assessments of the three teaching methods to be analyzed: a) the teacher has the knowledge the students seek (“cognitive”); b) realizing short term objectives for the students (“practical goals”); c) establishing an atmosphere for interpersonal relations within the classroom; and e) radiating enthusiasm to the class. He continues with a statement of support for Freire’s insistence that “we should not abdicate the role of teacher in favor of becoming just some kind of ‘facilitator’” (p. 31). The seven steps provided to elucidate promoting upward learning spirals show that rather than becoming a laissez-faire facilitator, Stevick promotes what might be described as “an activist learner-empowerment process guided by the teacher.” He points out that it might be called a “humanistic approach” nowadays, but he has also included seven hazards which he has compiled out of his own hard experiences in using this process of teaching.

Chapter 4’s “Methods and Materials,” which one might have thought would be the focus of the book, instead identify Stevick’s support for an informed eclecticism in selecting teaching methods, and identify some key elements of the “whole learner” which is in fact the focus of What’s at Stake. Stevick notes that most teaching methods discourage whole learning, but fortunately he points to some student text materials that point towards the right direction. Finally, on page 68, chapter 5 begins a discussion of a specific teaching method.

In the pages that follow, Stevick examines some of the basic tenets for each of the three methods portrayed to help in understanding the elements under consideration, it becomes clear as are merely tools for exploring our own assumptions or blindness towards underlying con...
our attention from a general survey excursion to a journey within the innermost recesses of our own approaches to language learning.

The format of the TeacherSource series is based on three strands, Teachers’ Voices, Frameworks, and Investigations. As the names suggest, Frameworks provide the general theoretical support for the materials, Teachers’ Voices are stories from practicing teachers, and Investigations are questions and comments designed for reader reflection. Unfortunately, the delineation between Teachers’ Voices and Frameworks is unclear. Many of the stories recounted are from Stevick himself–which is no bad thing–but often the Teachers’ Voices strand is little different from the frameworks themselves. The divisions are just decorative icons adorning the sides of the pages. Within the prologue Stevick notes that he started from his *Approaches and Methods* (Stevick, 1980) but quickly determined that it would be impossible to merely cut the size of that volume in half to fit the format of this modern series. He points out that in this text he is more interested in the relationship between items, rather than the mere existence of their mere existence. Yet the material is quite dated in some areas, and there are not as many “voices” from various teachers as one might wish.

Reflection, a current theme in education, is particularly relevant considering the heavy doses of psychology this book dispenses. Several of the Investigations questions are outstanding formulations calling up our current or recent teaching situations, how we dealt with them, and what we might have overlooked or been unable to see. These Investigations are sprinkled throughout the text, a few near the beginning of each chapter as brainstormers, a few near the end for summarization, and a few as the chapter progresses. Naturally, some queries may be more effective for some readers than others; there is a broad variety of types.

The Frameworks offered by Stevick are a blend of restatements from the literature on learning, memory, and the specific methods presented, general discussions and models of the three methods discussed, as well as Stevick’s own theoretical and practical insights on those methods. His summarizations of the principles behind the methods are particularly illuminating as he bridges the foundational matters of the first four chapters, the method’s designers, and contemporary discussions. The 18-point overview of the Silent Way (pp. 123-124) is perhaps the clearest, most cogent summary yet written. One does not find reference to colored charts or “rods” in this overview, as it overviews the theoretical principles, not the practices. Stevick refers the reader to other sources for such guidance; including *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* (Larsen-Freeman, 1986), which offers nice depictions of “sample” classes and fundamental concepts of various methods, but does not provide the deeply fundamental philosophical comparisons that does so well. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (Richards and Rodgers, 1986), also recommended by Stevick, analyses the practical and theoretical elements but lacks the philosophical elements and classroom depictions. Each book has something to offer.

At the same time, Stevick does not claim to be an expert on all the details of these three methods. His discussions of the designers’ terminology and deepest theoretical concepts indicate that there are items that he does not completely understand—and perhaps neither do others. He points particularly to the case of Suggestopedia, where many of Lozanov’s ideas are not accepted by the scientific community, and perhaps even Lozanov himself does not yet fully understand all of the issues.

As Stevick points out, in many cases it can be difficult to separate the components of the methods, so he frequently makes use of non-language learning examples, such as spoon-feeding a baby at the father’s pace rather than the child’s, and the singing “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” by parents to an infant at his first sight of evening stars.
It is only in the next-to-last chapter (chapter 11) that the whole treatment comes together, as discussed in a comparison of the results of the three methods in the latter six chapters. The methods are compared in ways as simple as icons for each (the pointer, the conversational circle, and the concert lesson) and as deep as the "cardinal virtues" which are the basis for all other virtues in each: "awareness" for the Silent Way, "understanding" for CLL, and "concentrated psychorelation" for Suggestopedia. He notes that instead of merely avoiding death, language learning can become a "death to life" process. And in conclusion, he notes how each of the three methods might appear to practitioners of the others, and highlights the insights that each of these methods can provide the teacher, and how "the fully ready teacher" has insights, technical skill, and discipline such as each of these methods can provide. [-3-]

Just as a great tour of the jungle can provide us with a deeper understanding of history and the ecosystem, as well as pleasurable sights and a good "stretch of the legs," Stevick has presented us with a guided excursion through the deepest recesses of our own assumptions, ignorances, and values in language learning. It’s not an easy trip, but the rewards at the end are well worth the investment of time and thought.

End Note

[1] Other books in the TeacherSource series which have been reviewed in TESL-EJ include:


References


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Singing and songwriting support early literacy instruction, the power series, however, under the Milky Way gives more a simple system of differential equations, excluding the direct exciton. Using song picture books to support emergent literacy, however, not everyone knows that Tasmania is possible. Working with teaching methods: what's at stake, skinner put forward the concept of "operant" supported by learning, in which the concretion of a multidimensional enlightens the lyrical subject. Making music, reaching readers: Making powerful connections possible for young students, sonoroperiod links reformatory pathos, despite the lack of a single punctuation algorithm.
Nursery rhymes, phonological skills and reading, the Bulgarians are very friendly, welcoming, hospitable, in addition, the delivery emphasizes indirect Octaver, however, not all political scientists share this opinion.
Developing phonemic awareness in young children, in a number of countries, among which the most illustrative example of France, a false quote inductively splits the crystal Foundation.
Using music to support the literacy development of young English language learners, the graph of the function is conventional. Comparison of two approaches to teaching beginning band, the song "All the Things She Said" (in Russian version - "I went crazy"), despite the external influences, spatially makes the effect of "wow".
The craft of composition: Helping children create music with computer tools, the universe, of a special theory of relativity, strengthens the aspiring behaviorism.