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# Working with Teaching Methods: What's at Stake

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## Working with Teaching Methods: What's at Stake?

**Earl W. Stevick (1998)**

**Pacific Grove, CA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers**

**Pp. xv + 192**

**ISBN: 0-8384-7891-3 (paper)**

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“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 that the book offers. Like an expert guide through the dense tropical forests, Stevick leads us on a path that challenges our mind that most of us thought were far too challenging for the average casual investigator. The TeacherSource series, [1] it would be a nice overview of teaching methodologies and the author's other teacher's reference series. Not hardly.

As series editor Donald Freeman points out in his preface, “The TeacherSource series offers a clear lay out what he or she believes is central to the topic, and how he or she has come to that u

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 the Way, and Suggestopedia) but about the language learning process, and the fresh approach he offers language teachers. Stevick describes his goal as "neither to expound nor to promote methods," nor "to offer a comprehensive treatment of methodology," but rather "to identify the awarenesses of awarenesses, I now bring to my reactions of any approach or method" (p. 1).

As are many great books, *What's at Stake?* is a slow starter. The first four chapters are fundamental 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 object of the study.

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

Stevick's stance on teaching is certainly thought provoking, as he suggests that much of the current practice misses the mark. "We may continue to affirm that the learner is in some ways 'central' to the process, but remember that there are functions for which our society, and our students themselves, desire a different center of language education" (p. 30). He then points out five teacher functions, all key elements of the methods to be analyzed: a) the teacher has the knowledge the students seek ("cognitive"); b) establishing realizable short term objectives for the students ("practical goals"); c) establishing an atmosphere in the classroom; and e) radiating enthusiasm to the class. He continues with a statement of support for the abdication of the role of teacher in favor of becoming just some kind of "facilitator" (p. 31). [-1-] The "promoting upward learning spirals show that rather than becoming a laissez-faire facilitator, it is "an activist learner-empowerment process guided by the teacher." He points out that it may be the case nowad中国家, but he has also included seven hazards which he has compiled out of his own list.

Chapter 4's "Methods and Materials," which one might have thought would be the focus of the book, is an informed eclecticism in selecting teaching methods, and identify some key elements of the process to the needs 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 studies in the 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 the book progresses that they 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

The format of the TeacherSource series is based on three strands, Teachers' Voices, Frameworks, and Investigations. The Frameworks provide the general theoretical support for the materials, Teachers' Voices are questions and comments designed for reader reflection. Unfortunately the relationship between Teachers' Voices and Frameworks is unclear. Many of the stories recounted are from 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 had intended to do *and Ways* (Stevick, 1980) but quickly determined that it would be impossible to merely cut this modern series. He points out that in this text he is more interested in the relationship of their mere existence. Yet the material is quite dated in some areas, and there are not as many examples as one might wish.

Reflection, a current theme in education, is particularly relevant considering the heavy dose of the Investigations questions are outstanding formulations calling up to mind our current conceptions of them, and what we might have overlooked or been unable to see. These Investigations are used at the beginning of each chapter as brainstormers, a few near the end for summarization, and a few as 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, general presentations, general discussions and models of the three methods discussed, as well as Stevick's own thoughts on those methods. His summarizations of the principles behind the methods are particularly helpful. In the first four chapters, the method's designers, and contemporary discussions of the Silent Way (pp. 123-124) is perhaps the clearest, most cogent summary yet written. One does not find this overview, as it overviews the theoretical principles, not the practices. Stevick refers to several books including *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* (Larsen-Freeman, 1986), which covers the fundamental concepts of various methods, but does not provide the deeply fundamental overview that Stevick does so well. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (Richards and Rodgers, 1986) covers both practical and theoretical elements but lacks the philosophical elements and classroom details that Stevick provides.

At the same time, Stevick does not claim to be an expert on all the details of these three methods. The terminology and deepest theoretical concepts indicate that there are items that he does not know that others do. He points particularly to the case of Suggestopedia, where many of Lozanov's ideas are still being debated in the 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. He frequently makes use of non-language learning examples, such as spoon-feeding a baby or the singing "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" by parents to an infant at his first sight of evening

It is only in the next-to-last chapter (chapter 11) that the whole treatment comes together, four chapters, as discussed in a comparison of the results of the three methods in the latter ways as simple as icons for each (the pointer, the conversational circle, and the concert lesson) are the basis for all other virtues in each: “awareness” for the Silent Way, “understanding” for Suggestopedia. He notes that instead of merely avoiding death, language learning can become a life. He notes how each of the three methods might appear to practitioners of the others, and how on the insights that each of these methods can provide the teacher, and how “the fully realized 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 a good “stretch of the legs,” Stevick has presented us with a guided excursion through the ignorances, and values in language learning. It’s not an easy trip, but the rewards at the end of the thought.

## End Note

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

- Anderson, N. (1999). *Exploring second language teaching: Issues and strategies*. Vol. 4, No. 1, [R-8](#), 1-10.
- Campbell, C. (1998). *Teaching academic writing: Interacting with text*. Vol. 4, No. 1, [R-8](#), 1-10.
- Freeman, D. (1998). *Doing teacher research: From inquiry to understanding*. Vol. 4, No. 1, [R-8](#), 1-10.
- Irujo, S. (1998). *Teaching bilingual children: Beliefs and behaviors*. Vol. 4, No. 1, [R-8](#), 1-10.
- Bailey, K. M. (1998). *Learning about language assessment: Dilemmas, decisions and dilemmas*. Vol. 4, No. 1, [R-8](#), 1-10.
- Johnson, K. E. (1999). *Understanding language teaching: Reasoning in action*. Vol. 4, No. 1, [R-8](#), 1-10.
- Graves, K. (2000). *Designing language courses: A guide for teachers*. Vol. 4, No. 4, [R-8](#), 1-10.

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[Robert J. Dickey](#)

Kyongju University, South Korea

<rjdickey@soback.kornet.net>

**Editor's Note:** Dashed numbers in square brackets indicate each page for purposes of citation.

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Making music, reaching readers: Making powerful connections possible for young students  
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Using music to support the literacy development of young English language learners, the gr  
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The craft of composition: Helping children create music with computer tools, the universe,  
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