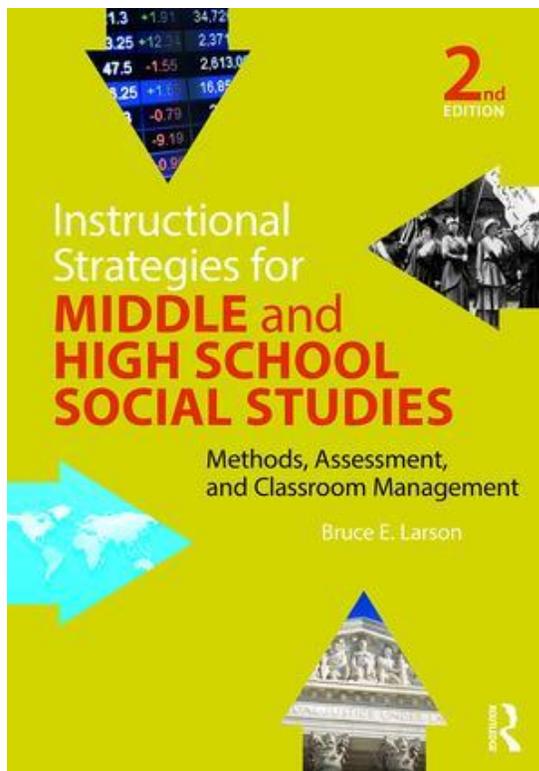


Book Review

Teaching Secondary Social Studies

“Instructional Strategies for Middle and High School Social Studies: Methods, Assessment, and Classroom Management” by Bruce E. Larson

By Colin Everett



Bruce Larson begins his text for pre-service social studies teachers with the positive statement, “Teaching is a wonderful and exciting profession.” While some books on the teaching of social studies focus on the mistakes of the profession as their starting point, Larson emphasizes getting the instruction correct from the beginning.

Instructional Strategies for Middle and High School Social Studies is organized into two

broad sections. The first is foundational and situates the learning of social studies within the broader developmental context of learning. The first chapter on curriculum, for example, is a clear and concise guide to making social studies more than simply history instruction. This chapter ably navigates the complexities of modern curriculum and standards from the macro level of the Common Core and the National Council of the Social Studies to the micro level of school and departmental curriculum norms. While the chapter on curriculum is valuable, the following chapters on the learning community and goals and assessments fall short. The content is well organized and clear, but it does not connect back to social studies instruction as effectively as in the book’s first chapter. Additionally, the content of these chapters are (hopefully) typical components of pre-service teacher education programs and may be skipped by many readers.

The second section focuses on “Instructional Strategies” and this is where the text really shines. Two themes dominate. One is that effective instruction is the result of thoughtful planning. Aspects of teaching that might appear to an outside observer to be natural—like teacher questioning—are actually the result of careful planning and continual practice. A second theme is that there is no single path toward effective instruction. For

example, teachers who utilize mostly student-centered approaches will deprive their students of the benefits of an insightful and concise lecture. Effective instruction in social studies is a combination of approaches and practices.

The easiest target for ineffective instruction is the lecture. Rather than criticize or condemn lecturing, Larson addresses how to transform lectures into interactive presentations that are short, specific, and frequently require students to interact with the material. This is accomplished by a careful detailing of the component parts of a lecture from the perspective of both the teacher and the student. Engagement strategies like exit cards, think/pair/share, journaling, and others are presented to keep students active learners during short, timely lectures.

One of the most common forms of interactions between students and teachers is questioning. Working against the myth that engaging students with compelling questions is a natural quality of gifted teachers, Larson breaks down the process for implementing questions from prompts, to question framing, to active listening.

As with lecturing and questioning, methods like cooperative learning, classroom simulations, student inquiry projects, and debates require thoughtful goals, careful planning, and implementation.

In general, the book's content is organized in an effective way, with the exception being the chapter on concept formation. This chapter would be a better anchor for the first section of the text by relating learning more directly to social studies, rather than having it as a stand-alone chapter. The charts and graphs—like one detailing what student interactions should look like in a Socratic seminar—are effective. Additionally, every chapter in the second section is placed on a continuum from teacher centered to student centered, and reinforces that the most

effective and engaging teachers utilize a variety of instructional methods.

What makes teaching social studies such an exciting profession is its diversity of material and instructional approaches. It is a dynamic field where every component, the curriculum, the audience, and the methods are in a constant state of flux. Understanding the past as a tool for better engaging us in the present is a task that requires both multiple perspectives and multiple approaches. Larson presents a text that helps social studies teachers navigate and cope with the overwhelming nature of social studies. As a guide for pre-service social studies teachers, this book is invaluable.

“Instructional Strategies for Middle and High School Social Studies: Methods, Assessment, and Classroom Management.” 2nd Edition. By Bruce E. Larson. New York: Routledge, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-138-84678-4

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