

Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

The Elements of Teaching (Second Edition)

By James M. Banner, Jr., and Harold C. Cannon.

New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017. 176 pp., (paperback)

ISBN: 978-0-300-21855-8, eBook ISBN: 978-0-300-22988-2

Reviewed by:

Xiaojun Kong, Independent Researcher

Chenkai Chi, University of Windsor

Banner and Cannon's (2017) *The Elements of Teaching* has a universal and enduring appeal. The first edition of this concise volume was published in 1997 and consistently attracted readers for over two decades, and the second edition has continued to garner the same level of attention. In addition to teachers and other staff in the field of education, this book targets a broader audience that includes educators, trainers in various industries, parents, and any individuals who teach others. In this book, Banner and Cannon dissect ten qualities that an effective and successful teacher possesses: learning, authority, ethics, order, imagination, compassion, patience, tenacity, character, and pleasure. Each chapter fully elaborates on one quality and concludes with a concrete illustration through a fictional case that exemplifies a teacher who does or does not possess the corresponding teaching element of the chapter. While methodological instruction is rarely explicitly addressed, pedagogy is thoroughly discussed; therefore, this book can yield immense rewards for veteran educators if they deliberate over the qualities to reappraise their teaching journey. For novice teachers and any person pursuing teaching as a future career, this book insightfully depicts the professionalism of teaching, which seems obvious but has scarcely been articulated based on Author 1's 10-year teaching and learning experience in China and Canada.

In the opening sentence, Banner and Cannon arrive straight to the point by declaring that teaching is an art. This statement manifests the keynote of the book: to explore the beauty of education rather than analytical approaches or techniques, such as how different teaching methodologies accommodate diverse groups of students. It is undisputed

that teaching is an art; nevertheless, the authors emphasize that the elements of teaching can rarely be taught, as they are inherent to humanity. This assertion is, in fact, a sagacious argument. Even teachers of the same subject who are undergoing the same training improvise theories and methodologies that are unique to their teaching practice in view of the complexity of teachers' mental lives and their cognitive development, which are mediated by the context in which they teach and learn to teach (Johnson, 2009).

One might assume that if the qualities cannot be taught, the teaching performance of some teachers is innately inferior to that of others. Banner and Cannon seek to help readers think from a perspective that, although those qualities are not learned, they can be called forth, understood, and employed variedly with expert knowledge and teaching techniques. From this perspective, teachers may embody the qualities of teaching in different styles, but those qualities can still be perfectly executed by successful teachers in their classrooms. This argument motivates teacher educators to encourage the qualities of teacher learners since the qualities facilitate the process of teacher learning. Moreover, only teachers who activate such qualities can achieve mastery of the subject they teach and the pedagogical knowledge through comprehensive and deliberate integration.

The authors start their explanation of the elements with learning and end with pleasure, which forms a coherent and unassailable structure. Lifelong learning for educators is undeniably essential. In language teaching, for example, any living language changes over time. Couch commerce and staycation, for example, are neologisms that English teachers teach that require teachers to understand new cultural trends in English-speaking discourse (Rets, 2016). This dynamic nature of language and language teaching proves that the knowledge base in language teacher education is not a static entity (Johnson, 2009). Accordingly, language teachers should consider their knowledge base as "a heuristic device" (Reagan & Osborn, 2002, p. 20) through which teachers can adopt an inquiry stance—individually or collaboratively with colleagues—that is defined by four processes: (1) regularly examining and reexamining their classroom practices, (2) identifying gaps and impediments in their teaching effectiveness, (3) determining how to fill such gaps, and (4) continuously reconstituting and reconceptualizing their own knowledge base over time (Freeman, 2018). People are more likely to commit to lifelong learning if they experience the pleasure of learning even though the learning process is often inundated with hardship. If teachers discover the pleasure of learning, they will be able to transmit that pleasure to students through their teaching, as revealed in the last chapter. Consequently, they will receive the pleasure of teaching by helping students acquire subject knowledge and embark on the process of inquiry, transforming students' lives, and enabling students to become socially responsible citizens.

Arguably, the qualities that Banner and Cannon detail are, as the authors admit, 'old-fashioned,' as none of the characteristics seems novel or beyond expectation. Nevertheless, they formulate the convincing justification that old-fashioned qualities convey classical and universal principles. Teachers can become reflective practitioners by connecting Banner and Cannon's arguments to the theoretical foundations that they

acquire in teacher education programs. For example, to expound on the learning quality, the authors demonstrate that knowledge acquisition is a shared and collaborative process that, reflects Jenkins' (2009) notion of collective intelligence and Tallerico's (2012) concept of shared instructional leadership. To elaborate on the imagination quality, the authors suggest that teachers not only teach the information that is already in textbooks but also adapt course content to meet students' needs. This accounts for the limitations of textbooks (Richards, 1993; 2001) and Kumaravadivelu's (2006) context-specific practice. Furthermore, the imagination quality closely relates to Greene's (2007) pedagogy of *imagination*, which means teachers imagine themselves in students' places and help students to imagine their future selves and, therefore, to arouse students' agency toward intellectual possibilities. Banner and Cannon's book reminds schoolteachers, teacher educators, trainers in various industries, parents, and any individual who would like to teach to cultivate their understanding of education as being wholly about the human and that such qualities of humanity qualify teaching methodologies and techniques to be viewed as an art. Periodic exploration and reflection on these elements of teaching and their association with the theoretical foundations of teaching methodologies empower educators with the necessary recourse to create effective and successful classes.

References

- Banner, J. M., Jr., & Cannon, H. C. (2017). *The elements of teaching*. Yale University Press.
- Freeman, D. (2018). Arguing for a knowledge-base in language teacher education, then (1998) and now (2018). *Language Teaching Research*, 1–12.
- Greene, M. (2007). Toward a pedagogy of thought and a pedagogy of imagination. *The Maxine Greene Institute*, 1–2. Retrieve from https://maxinegreene.org/uploads/library/toward_pt.pdf
- Jenkins, H. (2009). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*. MIT Press.
- Johnson, K. E. (2009). *Second language teacher education: A sociocultural perspective*. Routledge.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding language teaching: From method to post-method*. Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.
- Reagan, T. G., & Osborn, T. A. (2002). *The foreign language educator in society: Toward a critical pedagogy*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Rets, I. (2016). Teaching Neologisms in English as a Foreign Language Classroom. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 232, 813–820. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.10.110>
- Richards J. C. (1993). Beyond the text book [sic]: the role of commercial materials in language teaching. *RELC Journal*, 24(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F003368829302400101>

Richards, J. C. (2001). *The Role of Textbooks in a Language Program*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieve from <https://www.professorjackrichards.com/wp-content/uploads/role-of-textbooks.pdf>

Tallerico, M. (2012). *Leading curriculum improvement: Fundamentals for school principals*. Rowman & Littlefield Education.