

TEACHING CHANGE: HOW TO DEVELOP INDEPENDENT THINKERS USING RELATIONSHIPS, RESILIENCE, AND REFLECTION

José Antonio Bowen. *Teaching change: how to develop independent thinkers using relationships, resilience, and reflection*.
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021, 476 p.

The monograph entitled *Teaching Change: How to Develop Independent Thinkers Using Relationships, Resilience, and Reflection* by Dr José Antonio Bowen, published by Johns Hopkins University Press (2021) is a hardcover book of 476 pages. After months of personal life-changing events, I was very grateful for the opportunity to hold this book in my hands, as it was a gift with a thank you note by the organizers of *The 12th Digital Education Summit (#DES23)* at Sam Houston State University.

The special quality of the presented monograph is that it is written in a concise and relatively simple language, which makes it interesting to read. It is a timely book aimed at teachers and college instructors, as the author offers many additional end-chapter sections, in the form of “Key points” and “Teaching Hacks”. It is divided into three parts: Part I – “Change and Learning”, Part II – “A New 3Rs”, Part III – “Learning to Change”, and additionally, Acknowledgments, *Notes, References* and *Index*. The first part consists of five chapters: 1. “Educating for Uncertainty”, 2. “Your Brain-Closet”, 3. “Aiming Your Flashlight”, 4. “The Difficulty of Thinking for Yourself”, 5. “The Difficulty of Thinking with Others (and Why Discussion Can Fail)”. The second part elaborates “The New 3Rs” through three chapters (6) “Relationships”, (7) “Resilience”, and (8) “Reflection”. In the final part, Bowen focuses on *change* in three chapters dedicated to (9) “Driving Change”, (10) “Teaching Change” and (11) “Designing Change”.

In this book the author, through experience, innovation, and exploration of recent and multidisciplinary *research* (education, technology, social studies and humanities, economics, neuroscience), examines how to create better conditions for learning design focusing on students, moving from being “receivers of content” to becoming “independent thinkers”. Education needs to promote the

development of unique individuals who think for themselves. The author's most interesting reminder, which teachers tend to forget, is that teachers became teachers as they "found (or never lost) curiosity and love of learning", and that learning was, or still is, *important, fun, engaging and rewarding*. However, students may not share the same learning experiences, emotions and conclusions about *learning and education*, and therefore never will be able to *change*.

The author looks at skills and abilities for a learning economy, emphasizing that being able to learn across disciplines will be more important than graduates' knowledge of specific content. The future economies will depend on the person's ability to analyse, integrate, and self-direct his/her learning. In the following chapters of the first part of the book, the author explores the limitations of the emotional and social ways in which we think and organize information and why they influence the process of *change*. For the human brain Bowen introduces a "closet" metaphor, based on the analysis of neuroscience research on information processing, storage and retrieval of information. The author's aim is to move the emphasis from the *content* to *process*, therefore, from the "original 3Rs" (*reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic*) to the "new 3Rs" – *relationship, resilience, and reflection*, enabling teachers to create possibilities and moments of self-discovery in learning. The author continues the metaphor that "the only lighting in our brain-closet comes from a tiny flashlight" (Bowen, 2021: 75), focusing on personal limited attention, focus, cognitive load, and decision making, adding to the discussion on how strongly emotions may influence the thinking processes. Teachers are advised to "tell (relevant) stories", stories they can relate to, using the power of the narrative and examples more than data, creating opportunities for students' emotional engagement, as "each person's background, context, brain-closet, and emotional baggage are different; therefore, their easiest entry point to and motivation for learning differ" (Bowen 2021: 88).

Bowen focuses on researching new evidence from psychology on the *social thinking problem* and *social influences* when teaching critical thinking through group discussion, taking into consideration *internal pressures and hidden biases of how groups think together*. Friendship, relationships and the inevitable social group pressures (community approval/disapproval) in the learning context are fore-fronted as very important causes for resistance to *change* and important factors in the educational struggle to "open minds".

In the second part of the book the author focuses on teachers as *cognitive coaches*, encouraging or stimulating good learning behaviours. Working on motivation, trust, caring, and relationships within the academic learning environment, where resilience is regarded not only as *a kind of individual mental*

toughness, but is also related to *our sense of community, abundance, and support*, teachers should be *thinking of feedback as incremental encouragement* rather than praising, rewarding or evaluating. Furthermore, teachers are advised to *articulate, encourage and reward intellectual values* (curiosity, scepticism, discourse, evidence), through the practice of ambiguity, seeding doubt, seeking out contradictions, promoting self-awareness, as well as increasing the number of positive reactions and integrating learning experiences on the campus level.

In the final part of the book we are reminded that *all learning is personal*, with a *unique brain-closet of information and a system of organization*. The educational system was built for the development of human thinking or reasoning about the content of learning and not on the process of *how* we are learning (emotions) and the understanding of how thinking is also emotional. As education starts with relationships, teachers should focus on creating trust and opportunities for reflection through curated disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning encounters, enabling students to grow and leading them to find their unique learning path, thus helping them unlock their potential along their learning journey, guiding them to become self-directed thinkers. In conclusion, this book is aimed at teachers and educators who want to *change* and learn to *design change*. It may help teachers on their professional development paths, starting from personally identifying not as teachers of content and subjects by saying ‘I teach history’, but rather by identifying as teachers of *change*. This book may be of great value as additional reading literature for courses in Pedagogy and Teaching Methodology as it offers a unique and contemporary view on teaching and learning issues in Higher Education.

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