

## Book Reviews

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### AN IMAGINATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING

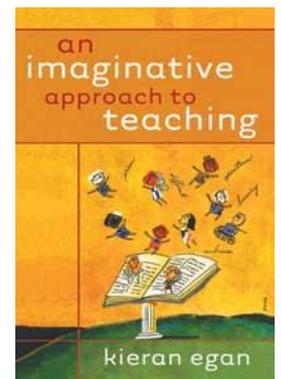
by Kieran Egan

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“All knowledge is human knowledge and all knowledge is a product of human hopes, fears, and passions. To bring knowledge to life in students’ minds, we must introduce it to students in the context of the human hopes, fears and passions in which it finds its fullest meaning. The best tool for this is the imagination” (Egan, 2005, p. xii).

*An Imaginative Approach to Teaching* presented by Kieran Egan is all about how we can connect imagination to education’s central tasks, and set students’ imagination to learning on a routine basis, in every classroom, on everyday of the school year. The book provides educators a new and powerful understanding of how imagination works in learning as well as suggesting specific teaching techniques that activate students’ emotions and imaginations in a variety of subject areas.

The book proposes that all children come into the classroom knowing how to use certain kinds of cognitive tools for learning, and an imaginative teacher should use these tools to provide engaging lessons in which students retain and use the knowledge they gain. In this aspect, the book identifies three types of cognitive tools that students can demonstrate, and then suggests a series of classroom practices incorporating these cognitive tools into specific lessons.

The book consists of three main chapters. Each chapter describes one type of cognitive tools that students utilize as they go through stages of cognitive development: oral language, literacy, and theoretical or abstract thinking. The first chapter explains the tools that come along with the oral language stage, such as story, metaphor, binary opposites, rhyme, rhythm, and pattern, jokes and humor, mental imagery, gossip, play, mystery, and embryonic tools of literacy. It is stated that most commonly the tools introduced in the first chapter will be found in young children, roughly before seven years, before literacy begins to significantly influence their thinking. Moreover, these tools are indicated to be highly effective in organizing and categorizing knowledge, as well as keeping in memorable form.

The second chapter explains the tools that mature with the literacy stage, such as sense of reality, extremes of experience and limits of reality, association with heroes, sense of wonder, collections and hobbies, knowledge and human meaning, narrative understanding, revolt and idealism, changing the context, literate eye, and embryonic tools of theoretic thinking. It is proposed that the tools mentioned in the second chapter are most commonly found in children, roughly between seven and nine years, after literacy become more fluent and thinking more realistic, and they are pointed out to be building upon the way

children understand their experiences. However, it is noted that they are “not to be seen as some kinds of hooks or motivators”, but as “clues to help solve the problem of how to make knowledge about the world meaningful to students” (p.36).

The third chapter explains the tools that develop with the theoretical thinking stage, such as sense of abstract reality, sense of agency, grasp of general ideas and their anomalies, search for authority and truth, and meta-narrative understanding. It is noted that the tools described in the third chapter will be found in young adults who have picked up the previous sets of tools, and they are regarded to be highly effective at enhancing students’ thinking ability, generating flexibility, and encouraging students to search out patterns, look for essences, and construct their theories.

After each chapter, a half chapter is provided showing practical relevance of these cognitive tools in preparing lesson plans on different subject matters. Examples of the first chapter include how to prepare lessons such as Place Value, Butterfly Transformations, Properties of Air, Homophones, and Heat. Similarly, examples of the second chapter include lessons such as Parallel Lines, Life Cycle of a Cold-Blooded Vertebrate, and Tree. Lastly, examples of the third chapter include lessons such as Revolutions, Calculus, Hamlet, and Simple Harmonic Motion. All these examples are written in a way that draw students into the content, drive their intellectual inquiry, and create a sense of wonder as they pursue their learning.

In general, the book offers an understanding of how students’ imaginations work in learning and demonstrates how the acquisition of certain kind of cognitive tools can drive students’ educational development gradually. It underlines the fact that the essence of teaching is not simply to teach facts and skills that can be reproduced when required but to relate the facts and skills to their deeper meaning in human

experience through the use of imaginative approach to teaching.

The book values imaginative education as it aims much more knowledgeable students who are able to think flexibly, creatively, and with energy. In this aspect, the book suggests teachers to regard the classroom as a place from which one takes off into other environments, so that they can easily engage students’ imaginations in learning. Lastly, it underlines the fact that in order for the imaginative thinking “to develop adequately and to work effectively, students need to know a lot” (p.169) about the related subject matters.

Overall, *An Imaginative Approach to Teaching* can be useful for teachers, teacher educators, staff development professionals in a great extend. No matter whatever style of teaching suits one best, the suggested teaching techniques can help teachers all age groups and all subjects, to plan their lessons in a more creative and imaginative way.

## REFERENCES

- Egan, K. (2005). *An Imaginative Approach to Teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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