

# Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

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## **The How and Wow of Teaching**

By Kathy Paterson

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## **Reviewed by**

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In *The How and Wow of Teaching*, Kathy Paterson generously shares knowledge and experiences from her career as a K-12 teacher. The artwork on the front cover introduces Paterson's book by drawing from the imagery of a comic-book superhero. It is in this spirit that the reader is introduced to the "wow factor" in teaching. On the back cover, Paterson explains that, "Teachers succeed when they grow, develop, and strive to maintain the excitement and wonder – the WOW – of learning". Paterson has written eight other books for teachers, also published by Pembroke.

The author's intention for writing the book was to establish excitement and wonder in teaching for beginning teachers and as a renewal for experienced teachers. *The How and Wow of Teaching* offers more than 50 time-tested strategies and tools for teachers to implement in their classrooms. Each page has a narrow left-hand margin featuring thought-provoking and motivational quotations from notable people, along with author's notes to the reader. The book has a very positive tone and when combined with the author's descriptions, holds engaging prospects for the reader that are just waiting to be unleashed. This is due in part to Paterson's attending to the topic of wonder as the major component of the "wow factor".

In a recent blog post, psychiatrist Neel Burton (2020) defines wonder as a "... complex emotion involving elements of surprise, curiosity, contemplation, and joy. It is

perhaps best defined as a heightened state of consciousness and emotion brought about by something singularly beautiful, rare, or unexpected—that is, by a marvel” (para. 5). As a starting point, Paterson explains that the “wow” of teaching is the direct result of understanding the “how” of teaching (p. 5). The author includes five chapters presenting lesson planning, teaching curriculum, teaching strategies, strategies for life and living, and teacher responsibilities. Paterson provides the requisite information and resources for planning, delivering, and evaluating instruction that can be applied to a variety of learners in K-12 contexts and does so in a manner appropriate for novice and experienced teachers alike.

The first and second chapters outline the importance of planning courses, units, and lessons that are grounded in government authorized curricula. Paterson notes that teachers who are prepared will be more confident, poised, attentive, and flexible, which comprise other components of the “wow” factor. Paterson notes that while it is the teacher’s professional responsibility to follow curriculum documents closely, HOW curriculum is taught is left to the teachers drawing from their understanding of students’ learning backgrounds, personalities, and interests. As teachers engage in the process of lesson planning and implementation, Paterson reminds us to be flexible, allowing for unexpected teachable moments. Next, chapter three describes an array of common teaching strategies. Strategies for life and living are the topics of the fourth chapter, that include making choices, along with teaching skills such as organization, responsibility, and self-regulation. Chapter five describes teachers’ responsibilities, including marking and teacher housekeeping, motivating students, being a leader and role model, along with working in partnership with parents.

Woven throughout Paterson’s five chapters describing the “how” of teaching are suggestions and hints to create the conditions for students to experience the multiple components of the “wow” factor. This is particularly important in our time, as from students’ perspectives utilizing various technologies in their personal lives, teachers presenting curriculum content may sometimes conflict with “... the immediate gratification offered by technology” (p. 47). The author makes a distinction between “grand strategies” that involve greater time commitments for delivering entire units of study that include cooperative learning, inquiry-based instruction, portfolio development, learning logs, interdisciplinary instruction, with “everyday strategies” such as role-play, games, visuals, and literacy. Paterson points out that one of the main goals for teacher-led strategies is for the

formation of independent-learning competencies, as these eventually become established as students' life strategies. The more and varied a teacher's teaching strategies can be, the more they are training independent learners.

Learners can experience wonder in their education when teachers combine knowledge of their students with instructional strategies, applied to instructional situations that promote self-awareness, intellectual and emotional wellbeing, and a deeper understanding of the world around them. Paterson explains that by choosing an appropriate strategy to target specific learning, teachers are attentive to creating something meaningful and memorable for students. Further, the author notes that teachers' choices of strategies "... should have distinctive appeal. The right strategy will capture students' attention and incite their interests and curiosity, creating that important wow factor ..." (p. 50). For example, when employing Paterson's grand strategies, she suggests using a thematic approach "If we want to develop students' ability to behave proactively in an ever-changing world" (p. 47). Inquiry-based instruction, in which students are encouraged to learn by doing, works well when incorporated with other learning strategies (pp. 52-53). When using portfolio development, it is important to keep in mind that "the final product is generally a source of student pride ..." (p. 53). One key strategy for life and living is making choices, and "when a child suddenly realizes they have a choice and can make that choice and accept the aftermath, they experience a wow sense of self-satisfaction" (p. 90).

While the book's content is energetic and informative, there are two aspects that may preoccupy the reader. There is little basis in research, and the author seems to strangely compete with the Internet. Paterson refers to elements of the teaching process that are commonly understood to be time-tested, and so does not provide any background information on the teaching strategies and tools that are presented. While the author comes close to applying theory needed to back up statements she has made, she defaults to summarizing that "... it is well known ..." (p. x), "... as research has shown..." (p. 15), and "... it has been shown ..." (p. 53) without citing any sources. Contemporary writing on best practices in teaching and learning is absent, specifically around ideas that may support how teachers understand their efforts toward achieving the "wow" factor in their practice based on the components that Paterson has discussed. For example, Donohoo (2018) describes how a "teacher's individual sense of efficacy influences student achievement indirectly through productive patterns of behaviour" (p. 324). Further, Donohoo explains that teaching practices associated with teacher efficacy that promote student

achievement include organized and thoughtfully planned teaching, along with willingness to try new instructional approaches. In addition, Paterson includes games as an everyday strategy that holds a great deal of appeal with students. Gamification is a strategy whereby something that is not a game is changed to include elements of game design in order to create a set of activities and processes to solve problems (Kim, Song, Lockee, & Burton, 2018). Its appeal to students has multiple and varied applications.

Early in the text, Paterson expresses concern that potential book purchases may be in competition with free resources that are available on the Internet. In order to persuade the reader to acquire her book, the author states that teachers' Internet searches to locate strategies and resources to inform their practice may not be effective in terms of time and effort: "Rather than using your valuable time in this sort of search, you can access instantly available ideas from this book" (p. 5). However, on multiple occasions, after introducing a concept the author will advise the reader to search the Internet in order to find additional resources if required to develop an idea further.

The book's strength is that it achieves the author's goal of providing a resource for teachers to think about, plan for, and create the "wow" factor in their classrooms. While the book has clearly been written for teachers who teach in-person, much of the content may be suitable for use and applicable when teaching online. *The How and Wow of Teaching* is a reference text that provides an effective introduction to the topic and has the potential to encourage creativity in teachers, resulting in more engaged students.

## References

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