

Book Review: *Thinking About Teaching: A Rural Social Studies Teacher's Path to Strive for Excellence*

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Maintaining enthusiasm to teach and balancing the realities of teaching today, Casey Jakubowski appraises being an educator in *Thinking About Teaching: A Rural Social Studies Teacher's Path to Strive for Excellence*. Jakubowski's "how to" prepare and reflect on one's instructional practice is a must read for educators. As a former social studies teacher and currently as a teacher educator, I appreciate the way that Jakubowski addresses becoming an educator. *Thinking About Teaching* is a book that a reader can jump into at any part or any chapter to learn about the successes and the challenges of being an educator.

Jakubowski offers an informative platform about his own experiences as a social studies teacher, a district curriculum leader, a New York State Education Department (NYSED) associate, and a teacher educator. His purpose is to share his professional journey while teaching newer and future teachers the macros and micros of teaching. Not only is this book a product of his professional journey, but he also spotlights rural education. Jakubowski's personal experiences, scholarship, and teaching career is well-informed by rural contexts. *Thinking About Teaching* provides a certified social studies teacher's perspective, yet the book presents insights for pre-service teacher candidates and all content-certified teachers.

Jakubowski hooks the reader with the phrase *tea, coffee, or cocoa?* to center an educator's mindset for building relationships. This beverage metaphor demonstrates a multi-tiered support system that addresses social-emotional learning (SEL), and how a teacher can address individual needs of students, parents, and even colleagues. Each beverage requires different time, preparation, and ingredients,

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likewise, so does SEL support. Jakubowski asserts that a welcoming intention needs to happen every day while extra care may be required based on the situation. Jakubowski prioritizes the affective domain often and empathetically throughout the book.

The book structure is divided into four parts. Jakubowski writes with simplicity yet depth on a range of topics, such as teacher evaluations, digital literacy, and civic participation. Each part provides brief and accessible chapters that are straightforward describing complicated issues based on Jakubowski's own encounters with students, educators, and policy makers. The book also presents two interlude sections called, *Resource* and *Reflection*. Each interlude provides excellent education resource recommendations and gives the reader a pausing moment to consider one's own teaching journey. Every chapter ends with readers being encouraged to Tweet their reflection using the hashtag #ThinkingAboutTeachingBook.

Part One—"Reflecting on Education and the Art of Teaching," and Part Two—"Curriculum and Instruction" describe the author's personal and professional teaching experiences. Students' well-being comes first, then attention to lesson planning that is relevant and relatable to learners. For Jakubowski it is not about the content, yet all about meaningful concepts, worthwhile resources, kid-friendly lessons, and an interdisciplinary mindset. Two notable chapters were *Best Lesson I Ever Did*, and *Worst Lesson Ever* when Jakubowski describes his instruction - the good and the bad. He underscores the teacher evaluation process in order to inform readers about the teaching framework by Charlotte Danielson (2007). Jakubowski defines Danielson's four domains, clarifies highly effective through ineffective rating levels, and candidly gives examples from his own instructional practice. These pointers are valuable to newer teachers.

Jakubowski prioritizes interdisciplinary lesson ideas which reflect student-centered learning and inquiring about concepts/issues/topics. A couple chapter examples that are relatable to all content areas include: *The Cold of Winter* when students learn about vacation hotspots and the impact of climate change with reading the book *The Little Ice Age* by Brian Fagan (2000); and *Civic Engagement and Knope* when Jakubowski teaches about the functions of government based on the television show *Parks and Recreation* (Daniels et al., 2015).

While Jakubowski's insights to teaching and SEL are useful for veteran and novice educators, his professional journey was unique. He worked for NYSED which informs Jakubowski's perspective, and insights that most educators are not afforded to during their careers. The author's own life was influenced by public works and cultural centers as a learner and a teacher. Even though local history, museums, and state parks are important to Jakubowski, and I agree with his advocacy, not all educators may share his viewpoint and/or have the opportunity to take advantage of these great resources. However, Jakubowski should be commended for pinpointing ways that educators can better utilize these public resources to improve their students' learning experiences. He encourages readers to think local. Connecting with your local or state's park systems and cultural institutions are some ways to teach about civics, geography, history, and other disciplines from your own community.

Part Three—"Rural Education" and Part Four—"The Conclusion" take on a more serious tone as Jakubowski expounds about his scholarly work and NYSED. Jakubowski addresses the uniqueness of rural education with "challenges of small size and small resources" (p. 180). He definitely prioritizes the rural perspective as influenced by his own educational experiences. That said, the author may be biased when comparing school reforms between rural, suburban, and urban schools. Jakubowski highlights that students dwelling in urban or suburban communities usually receive more attention from policy-makers than rural communities. He pinpoints obstacles endured by rural communities as more extreme than other demographically challenged communities, such as poverty, opioid addiction, declining

populations, and political apathy. However, some of these factors (e.g., funding, policy, social issues) may also impact urban and suburban school districts. Jakubowski argues that policy makers misunderstand rural education. He asserts unequal education budgetary methods and state mandates burden rural school districts more compared to other school systems. Besides noting problems, Jakubowski also advocates for alternative solutions, such as the Science Technology Engineering, Math (STEM) approach, and project-based learning. Notable, his passion rests upon rural education as he provides important scholarly data to inform the uniqueness of rural schools and the impact of state education reforms on their communities (Jakubowski, 2019). While Jonathan Kozol (1991) is well known for addressing problems with urban schools, it seems that Jakubowski aims for similar notoriety in his own scholarly work.

To close the book, Jakubowski summarizes his argument, shares the reasons why he left the classroom, and gives accolades to teachers who really do impact their students. Most notable is Chapter 38 - *So...How Did We Get Here?* which details education reform history. He compares *A Nation at Risk* (1983) to current day issues (i.e., high-stake testing, standards movement, and teacher shortages). While some chapters in Part Four may seem gloomy, Jakubowski expresses his reasons for leaving the classroom as he aimed to be a change agent.

Again, Jakubowski is brutally honest when expressing his own teaching story while offering optimism for current classroom teachers and future educators. Jakubowski stated “school [teacher preparation programs] doesn’t prepare you for these disasters” (p. 214) as he acknowledges his personal obstacles and professional challenges with trauma and tragedy, especially the loss of students and parents he once worked with.

Currently, Jakubowski is a teacher educator at a public higher education institute in New York State aiming to equip future educators in the teaching profession. He believes finding like-minded and motivated colleagues to collaborate with along with mentors to guide you can be difference-maker to stick it out as a K-12 teacher.

I recommend *Thinking About Teaching* for growth-mindset educators seeking to improve their craft. Jakubowski describes exemplary authentic, student-centered learning, and care-filled teaching methods. The book also details the ebbs and flows of education policy and reforms that still impact teachers today. While Jakubowski champions the learning needs of students living in rural communities, he identifies and explains important instructional practices by addressing the difference between compliance and comprehension. This book is best suited for teacher educators to read with their pre-service candidates in their methods courses and school district mentor and mentee teachers as Jakubowski richly communicates the teaching field - inside and out.

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