Is there a magic formula for learning?

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ABSTRACT

Concerns about students' learning difficulties worldwide have generated great research in the educational field. In the last decade, there has been growing dissemination of methods seeking to help students become more efficient learners. Given this context, this review discusses the contributions, possibilities, and limitations of the "power learning method," which is presented in the book "The Learning Power Approach: Teaching Learners To Teach Themselves" by Guy Claxton. The method is an account of his experience as an educator in different parts of the world and demonstrates positive responses to the challenges proposed to the students who participated in the activities. It is worth pointing out that, as with any educational method, the teacher must evaluate their reality and make the necessary adaptations for its use or even conclude that it is impossible to apply it in their classroom.

KEYWORDS: Learning. Teaching strategy. Learner. Power of Learning Method.

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Existe fórmula mágica para aprender?

RESUMO

Preocupações com a dificuldade de aprendizagem dos estudantes em todo mundo tem gerado diversas pesquisas na área educacional. Além disto, na última década há uma crescente divulgação de métodos que tem a pretensão de ajudar os alunos a serem aprendizes mais eficientes. Esta resenha discorre sobre as contribuições, possiblidades e limitações do "método do poder da aprendizagem – MPA", que é apresentada no livro "Ensinando os alunos a se ensinarem: O método do poder da aprendizagem", de Guy Claxton. O método trata-se do relato de sua experiência como educador em diferentes partes do mundo, e demonstra respostas positivas frente aos desafios que foram propostos aos estudantes que participaram das atividades. Vale ressaltar que como qualquer metodologia educativa, o professor deve avaliar a sua realidade e fazer as adaptações necessárias para seu uso, ou ainda, concluir a impossibilidade de aplicação em sua sala de aula.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Aprendizagem. Estratégia de ensino. Aprendiz. Método poder da aprendizagem

Existe fórmula mágica para el aprender?

RESUMEN

La preocupación por las dificultades de aprendizaje de los estudiantes de todo el mundo ha generado varias investigaciones en el área educativa. Además, en la última década ha habido una creciente difusión de métodos destinados a ayudar a los estudiantes a convertirse en aprendices más eficientes. Esta revisión analiza las contribuciones, posibilidades y limitaciones del "El poder del método de aprendizaje - MPA", que se presenta en el libro "Enseñar a los estudiantes a enseñarse a sí mismos: El poder del método de aprendizaje", de Guy Claxton. El método consiste en relatar su experiencia como educador en diferentes partes del mundo, y demuestra respuestas positivas a los desafíos que se propusieron a los estudiantes que participaron en las actividades. Es de destacar que como toda metodología educativa, el docente debe valorar su realidad y hacer las adaptaciones necesarias para su uso, o incluso concluir la imposibilidad de aplicarla en su aula.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Aprendiendo. Estrategia de enseñanza. Aprendiz. método de poder de aprendizaje

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Review

Student motivation is widely discussed in educational psychology, highlighting the need to promote their engagement in school activities, which is related to how much this student is committed to the achievement and active participation of their studies, which may involve behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agent aspects. Therefore, it starts from the assumption that the learner has an important role in their learning process.

It is evident that students' interest is a fundamental element of their learning process, although one must be aware with this accountability, assigning to them the exclusivity of school success or failure, forgetting the other variables linked to this indicator.

One of the variables that must be considered is that most students do not have the cognitive tools necessary to develop learning, especially the thought processes, more precisely, those responsible for the individual's reflexivity.

This book, released in 2019 and containing 200 pages, is an initiative by the author to disseminate part of his experience as a cognitive scientist, an expert in intelligence expandability, a researcher in the field of education, and his work as an educational consultant in different contexts.

The work is divided into 11 chapters; in the first chapter, Claxton tells his experiences as an apprentice when he met professors who did not supervise his activities, which he names as a kind of "benign neglect." In this way, he talks about the need he had to become solely responsible for his learning. This aroused special interest in Claxton in thinking about how he could learn better, thus exercising what he refers to throughout his work as "the muscles of learning."

It is precisely at this point, in terms of thinking about one's learning, that Claxton (p. 17) problematizes the current situation in most schools. The author denounces that schools do not invest in an education that develops

their students' thinking, and end up forming, even if unintentionally, "apathetic, passive, extrinsically motivated, dependent, dogmatic, timid, fragile, and gullible young people.

For Claxton, these schools, evaluated by their students' performance, are forced to value only the grades. Nevertheless, he emphasizes the need to invest in a type of education capable of developing curiosity, proactivity concerning the interest in learning, mobilization of intrinsic motivation (i.e., going beyond studying to earn concepts and grades and seeking satisfaction in developing learning for something that challenges), an independent mind that seeks to learn (i.e., a participative mind in the learning process), and criticality and skepticism, which should have the non-confidence in everything that is presented as an objective, especially that which does not seem reliable.

Claxton raises recurrent and problematic issues that we have faced for ages in our schools, in addition to listing the essential characteristics for forming students who can meet the demands of this society. However, in regards to his thesis based on his experience as a student, in which the lack of guidance from his teacher led him to seek alternatives to improve his learning, it does not seem to be a dialogical solution capable of being efficient for a good portion of Brazilian students.

One pivotal point is the concept of learning. This is covered in chapter 2, which begins by defining three themes that have a similar relationship: knowledge, learning, and the power of learning. Knowledge is what the learner knows or knows how to do, while learning is a change in what they know or how something is done. The power of learning is described as the change in how the individual learns. In this sense, it is clear that in order to understand the power of learning and, consequently, the Learning Power Approach (LPA), it is necessary to have a good understanding of what learning is. For this, he cites throughout the work several references to this concept:

- Learning is made up of a set of sophisticated skills which must be well orchestrated with each other (p. 165), and can be trained and learned through exercises (p. 83) to strengthen these learning abilities and attitudes (p. 165). It is worth remembering that learning is not only a matter of ability but also of willingness (p. 43).

- Learning is not just a capacity for belief capacity but something that involves passion and feeling. [...] it is full of feeling. Therefore, there is a series of words that can express the feelings involved in learning: frustrated, surprised, determined, satisfied, intrigued, blocked, fascinated, confused, amazed, absorbed, disappointed, shocked, proud, etc. (p. 44). Learning always involves surprises, disappointments, and frustrations (p. 45).

- Along with these feelings, learning promotes joy, given it is one of the most readily available forms of happiness (p. 78).

- Learning is a confused and uncertain state (p. 125).

- Learning should not be confused with education outcomes (i.e., it does not mean "getting better grades"). Learning is a process (p. 155).

- Learning for life (home, work, and social life) involves basic attitudes such as curiosity, boldness, determination, and collaboration (p. 62). Moreover, most learning worthwhile for this real world requires "time, effort, and trial and error" (p. 49).

- It is possible to improve learning by fostering a classroom culture based on the idea that it is possible to learn how to learn. Promoting dialogue about learning issues is a beneficial tool for students (p. 75).

Chapter 3 discusses the purpose of the Learning Power Approach:

> The goal of the Learning Power Approach (LPA) is to develop all students to be confident and capable learners - readly, willing, and able to choose, create, research, seek, solve, and evaluate learning for themselves, alone and with others, in and out of school (CLAXTON, 2019, p. 41).

According to the author, the method aims to prepare students for the challenges and uncertainties of future life. For the school, the LPA serves as a "springboard" for learning as it intends to adjust all the tools available in the "toolbox" of learning and to stop focusing on the two that are most usual in most schools: memorizing and repeating (p. 29-30). The learning "toolbox" also features observation, reading, criticism, experimentation, imagination, reasoning, imitation, discussion, reflections, and practice.

Chapter 4 describes how to begin using the LPA and some of the quick gains it can provide. Chapter 5 demonstrates why the power of learning is important and cites ten good reasons to exercise your "learning muscles." Chapter 6 revisits learning, but now through the "power of learning," while chapter 7 discusses the power of learning (PL), providing some illustrations of its use in the classroom.

Chapter 8 presents the principles of creating the LPA classroom, and reports of some evidence regarding LPA are found in chapter 9, in which the author leaves some clues as to what this method would be like, as there is no clear definition throughout the work. Through the successful cases of the LPA, he cites activities developed in the partner schools and testimonials from students and teachers. With this, it is understood that the LPA is teaching while being concerned with the students' thinking. And once students master the cognitive tools of learning, they put them into practice during the activities conducted in the classroom by the teacher. The central concern of the LPA is the development of thinking, and the specific content of the subjects will be a consequence of this development. Lastly, chapter 10 provides the distinctions and misconceptions, whereas, in chapter 11, the author reports the importance of integrating culture into student learning.

It is a fluid and compact reading that brings subjects discussed nowadays in a didactic way, including habits of mind by Art Costa and Bena Kallick, developing a growth mindset by Carol Dweck, visible thinking by David Perkins and Ron Ritchhart, learning challenge

("learning hole") by James Nottingham, learning dimensions by Robert Marzano, sparks of genius by Robert and Michèle Root-Bernstein, as well as self-regulation, critical thinking, creative thinking, metacognition, among others, which makes the book a reference catalog of contemporary learning scholars.

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that this is not an academic book and cannot be taken as an exclusive model to be practiced by the teacher. It should be seen as work based on an experience report, and each teacher or learner who wishes to employ the method presented by Claxton should consider their reality and make the necessary adaptations. After all, learning is a process, and each person will play their role, so learning how to learn is possible, albeit recognizing oneself as the author of the learning. For this, learning methods and tips are useful as parameters and good practices but not as magic formulas.

References

CLAXTON, Guy. *Ensinando os alunos a se ensinarem: O método do poder da aprendizagem*. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2019.