

Textbooks Fail to Deliver On What Every Teacher Needs to Know

Strategies proven to help students learn barely mentioned

Washington DC — Every year teacher candidates in the United States spend an estimated \$40 million to purchase textbooks purporting to teach how children learn—yet almost none of them cover the core strategies they will need as teachers to increase student learning and retention.

That finding is among the most important in a new study released today by nonpartisan, nonprofit National Council on Teacher Quality (www.nctq.org). The report, [*Learning About Learning*](#), looked at a representative sample of textbooks used in programs which are training elementary and secondary teachers. Not one of the textbooks selected by programs for assignment in educational psychology or methods coursework—where teacher candidates typically learn about learning—provided even minimal coverage of the small set of research-based instructional strategies most likely to be effective in any kind of classroom, no matter the age or subject. These strategies were identified by the Institute of Education Sciences, the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education, in [a guide released in 2007](#).

At best, the textbooks reference a fraction of what would benefit teachers, speaking to one or two of the core strategies.

“Teacher candidates are being sold a bill of goods, being asked to spend millions of dollars on textbooks which fail to deliver,” said Kate Walsh, president of NCTQ. “Depriving teachers of this essential professional knowledge is a tremendous disservice. The notion that novice teachers will eventually just ‘catch on’, learning as they teach, may have been a necessity in 1950; it’s not the case now, courtesy of a half century of great research.”

In addition to analyzing the textbooks, NCTQ looked for evidence from a sample of teacher preparation programs that core instructional strategies are taught regardless. As indicated by lecture topics and student assignments, no evidence could be found that the programs are somehow working around the deficiencies of textbooks.

The IES identified six core instructional strategies supported by conclusive research, including: 1) distributing student practice or review of new material over weeks and even months; 2) pairing graphics or other types of visual information with oral instruction; 3) testing students on new material to facilitate recall; 4) accompanying abstract ideas with concrete examples; 5) alternating problems that the teacher solves with problems that students must independently solve; and lastly, 6) posing probing questions to students to deepen conceptual understanding of new material.

Only this last strategy, the need for teachers to ask probing questions, was present to any significant degree either in textbook coverage or in coursework. Even this was covered by fewer than half of the textbooks studied.

Publishers of the 48 textbooks in the sample were each invited to respond to the findings in the study or to ask authors to do so. Only one author and one publisher chose to respond.

Many of the topics that are covered in the textbooks may be of value to future teachers, just not to the exclusion of the instructional strategies. Common topics include the benefits of cooperative learning, the pros and cons of homework; when to best use direct instruction; the importance of keeping students engaged and mechanisms teachers can use to elicit what students may already know about a subject.

The full report can be accessed [here](#).

About the National Council on Teacher Quality

The National Council on Teacher Quality is a nonpartisan research and policy group committed to modernizing the teaching profession based on the belief that all children deserve effective teachers. We recognize that it is not teachers who bear responsibility for their profession's many challenges, but the institutions with the greatest authority and influence over teachers. To that end we work to achieve fundamental changes in the policy and practices of teacher preparation programs, school districts, state governments, and teachers unions. Our [Board of Directors](#) and [Advisory Board](#) come from a broad range of backgrounds and perspectives, and they all believe that policy changes are overdue in the recruitment and retention of teachers. More information about NCTQ can be found on our website, www.nctq.org.

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