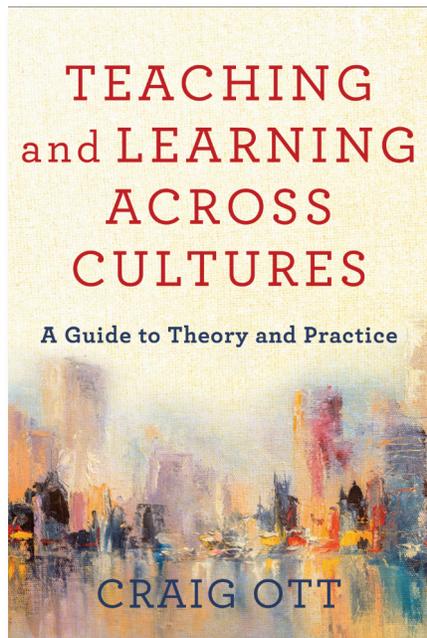


REVIEW: *Teaching and Learning Across Cultures: A Guide to Theory and Practice* by Craig Ott

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Ott, Craig. *Teaching and Learning Across Cultures: A Guide to Theory and Practice*
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Those who are making disciples and teaching cross-culturally will inevitably encounter differences in both teaching and learning habits. Craig Ott's book, *Teaching and Learning Across Cultures*, challenges and equips cross-cultural teachers to contextualize their instruction by adapting their teaching methods and content to best serve the needs, expectations, and worldview of their students (55, 240). Missionaries, education professionals, and even short-term mission volunteers would benefit from the many practical implications of this new book.

Awareness of cultural differences does not automatically translate into the implementation of effective teaching practices. Ott's goal is to bridge the cultural gap between teachers and learners and he does this by providing both cross-cultural pedagogical strategies and research into the theories that form the foundation for these strategies (4).

Ott structures most chapters by first dealing with "various theories and empirical research related to teaching across cultures" before giving implications for teachers. (280). He provides the necessary arguments and tools so that teachers can adapt their content and teaching strategies to match unique cultural contexts (22).

Chapters 1–3 frame the challenges, define culture, explain cultural competency, and describe culture's impact on learning. Both rookie and seasoned cross-cultural teachers are reminded about fundamental questions about learning such as, "What constitutes

knowledge? What does it mean to teach and learn?” (14). These questions set up the purpose and thesis of the book, which is to help teachers make wise, contextually effective pedagogical decisions based on their awareness of local traditions, context suitability, and learner expectations (64). The remainder of the book covers the following cultural dimensions that are critical for cross-cultural teaching: cognitive, worldview, social, media, and environmental.

In Chapter 4, Ott explains theories about how people perceive, process, and structure information cognitively. This chapter emphasizes the fact that cultures may differ in their experiences and habits of thought, but this does not equate to differences in capacity or assume one culture is logical while another is illogical (78, 82). Ott acknowledges that some readers have less interest in cognitive theories and encourages them to skip to the practical implications found in subsequent chapters.

In Chapters 5–6, Ott encourages Western teachers who consistently utilize abstract methods to consider incorporating stories to better connect with concrete thinkers and oral learners (89–93). A sub-theme originating in Chapter 5 encourages teachers to intentionally integrate both familiar and new teaching strategies to learners (109). Ott provides specific examples (i.e., storying) that support general principles that may be applied to various contexts. Informed teachers will know when to adhere to learner expectations and alternatively, when to diverge and introduce alternative learning challenges.

In Chapters 7–8, Ott alerts teachers to the fact that foundational cultural commitments and non-reflective presuppositions often influence the learning environment in unseen ways (137–140). Worldview impacts both the disposition of the learner to the teacher and the way the teacher earns and keeps credibility. Ott acknowledges that teachers, especially those whose subject is Scripture, teach because they want to influence and bring about worldview change. Teachers depend on the Holy Spirit to bring about heart/worldview change and Ott consistently gives both biblical and practical advice for those teaching theology cross-culturally.

In Chapters 9–10 Ott argues, “Navigating relationships between teacher and student is perhaps the most essential skill the cross-cultural teacher needs to be effective” (177). Throughout these chapters’ discussions on power distance and individualism versus collectivism, Ott allows the place for countercultural methodology, but spurns any approach that is uninformed or naïve.

Chapters 11–13 address misunderstandings that result because of the communication medium itself or because of the physical environment. Ott identifies several practical cross-cultural differences that affect learning, such as notetaking, illustrations, humor, and visual media. Ott writes that teachers who emphasize lecture or electronic modes of class material need to “expand their pedagogical toolbox and employ teaching tools and learning experiences beyond verbal” (229).

While each of the five dimensions receives a chapter summary, a concluding chapter would have served the book’s audience by showing the comprehensive and complementary nature of the five dimensions of the study.

Educators looking for robust research and foundational arguments will find satisfaction in this book, as will the practitioner looking for practical implications for their teaching ministry. I recommend this book as an important addition to missions’ literature and a helpful aid to cross-cultural teachers, whether in a formal or informal educational setting.

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