



Schwartz, D. L., Tsang, J. M., & Blair, K. P. (2016). *Review of The ABCs of how we learn; 26 Scientifically proven approaches, how they work, and when to use them.* New York: W. W. Norton.

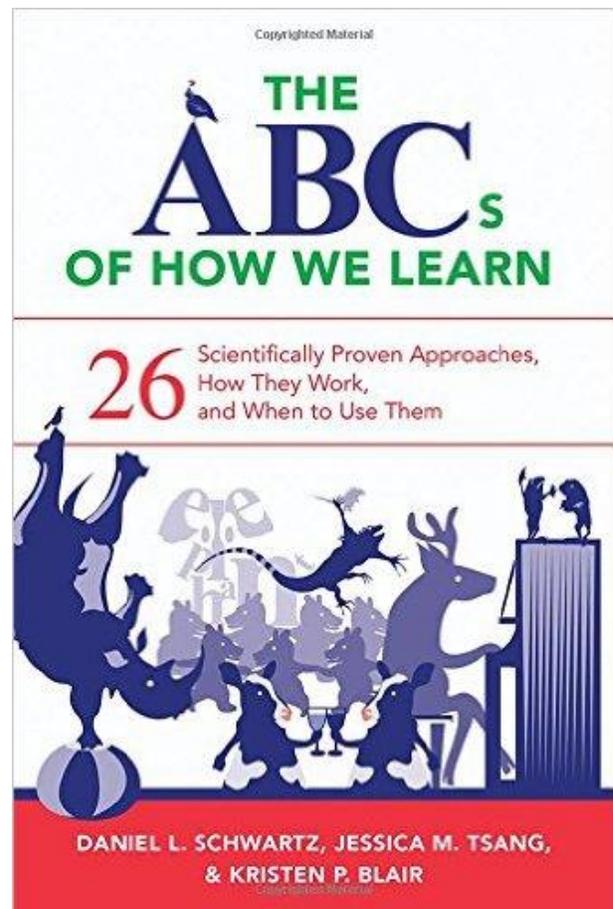
Pp. 367

ISBN: 978-0-393-70926-1

**Reviewed by Amanda Yentes
University of Wyoming
United States**

The title really says it all: this book lays out the approaches to learning outcomes in an easy to use, understandable, and unique ABC book fashion. *The ABCs of How We Learn* is broken down into 26 different sections of learning outcomes sorted by each letter of the alphabet. These multi-faceted learning outcomes can be combined to allow learners to achieve multiple learning outcomes for a single topic. The broad areas of interest covered in this book include conceptual understanding, memory, motivation, expertise, study skills, sense of inclusion, problem solving, collaboration, and discovery. The authors even included a quick reference list, including lettered sections that best support a specific area of interest. For example, if problem solving is the focus, the learner could reference sections “W is for Worked Examples”, “Q is for Question Driven”, and “F is for Feedback.”

This is a book for anyone in the education field, from parents to teachers to



administrators. Schwartz, Tsang, and Blair wrote this book to be an accessible resource for readers wanting to understand how people learn and seeking creative ways to most effectively meet learning goals and support learning. When I first held *The ABCs of How We Learn* in my hands I was drawn to the whimsical cover's true ABC book appearance, which came complete with animal representations for many of the letters, some of which were playing the piano, toasting, and dancing filling out the front cover. However, while the book's fun aesthetic is appealing to me as a primary education teacher, it may be a drawback for higher education or administrators. Some might not choose to look past the cover to crack the pages and find the scientifically founded research on best strategies for learning inside *The ABCs of How We Learn*.

It's no wonder that this book is so useful, since its authors are leading scholars and practitioners in the education field. Schwartz, Tsang, and Blair are all PhDs that bring different important elements to the table in *The ABCs of How We Learn*. Daniel Schwartz is an award-winning scientist with a background in high school teaching, Jessica Tsang conducts research that bridges cognitive neuroscience and effective classroom practice design, and Kristen Blair develops technologies that support students' math and science learning. The authors together have a good mix of educational and science/math experiences, which shows in their work *The ABCs of How We Learn*.

Once inside *The ABCs of How We Learn*, usability serves as a major theme. The authors have broken down each of the 26 lettered learning approaches into the following structure: what the approach is, how it works, how and when to use it, what it is good for, its risks (that is, caution about the potential drawbacks), a complete view of the strategy, examples of good recommended and not recommended use, references, and my personal favorite, a cheat sheet. The cheat

sheet would be my go to as a teacher as it retells the most critical aspects of the previous lettered section with a summary of each subheading in 1-5 sentences giving the reader a good idea of how to implement the learning strategy in the classroom.

The authors weave current research from multiple sources into each section giving further validity to their claims. In "M is for Making" the authors use examples of hobbyists who do anything from brewing beer, to racing motorcycles, to playing an instrument and how the making process can create a cycle where the learner enjoys what he or she is making and as a result are motivated to continue to learn, change, and grow in that process. These hobbyists are also motivated by a desire to share what is made with others, which reignites passion for the hobby and strengthens the making process. Within this real world example the authors incorporate a figure to show adult hobbyists and overall satisfaction in conjunction with citing *Make* magazine. The book is written with knowledgeable ease and the authors use humor and current cultural references to explain complicated scientific processes in learning. However, a word of caution: this book isn't the book for you if you want to do in-depth research on a particular learning approach. Instead it offers a starting point by including references that could be used as a springboard.

The ABCs of How We Learn is applicable to timely topics, and includes a multitude of visuals including graphs, charts, pictures, and many other useful examples to accompany the descriptions of each lettered strategy. These visuals are everywhere throughout the book, and the answer to why the authors chose this medium can be found in "V is for Visualization": which states "these spatial representations help people see structure and search for relations across different pieces of information" (p. 277). The book's visual structure supports the reader in the discovery of structure and aids them in

making new interpretations and efficient searches for information. A possible drawback to the use of the visuals, according to the authors, could be that the reader may draw a premature conclusion from the use of the visuals alone, which could lead to a misconception about the strategy. Throughout the book, the reader will find visuals paired with written examples and discussions for a well-rounded view of learning strategy from multiple angles, which also allows the reader a better chance to fully understand it.

As a teacher myself, I find this *The ABCs of How We Learn* to be a perfect quick reference for different learning approaches. Most notably I appreciate the book's two different indexes; one was a traditional index with keywords including referenced names and the other was a problem-focused index. This problem-focused index is another example of the above and beyond ease of use found throughout the book. I especially liked that the problem-focused index uses keywords to describe possible problems that the readers may be seeking a solution to. It then provides the reader with the corresponding lettered section that presents relevant strategies to address the reader's specific needs. For example if the reader is seeking ways to help

someone who is known for blaming others the reader can look up 'blaming others' in the problem focused index and they would be directed to the section for the letter "Y". The letter "Y" section presents to the reader "Y is for Yes I Can: increasing self-efficacy" and discusses the nuances of building self-efficacy. Overall, each section of this book is well organized and gives specific examples of each strategy and its application to the learner. These easy to read, clear, and concise sections are spot on for busy teachers who are looking for ways to increase engagement, motivation, and depth of knowledge in their students.

This versatile book has many potential uses and audiences. I think it would be perfect for someone who wants to investigate a particular area of focus, a group of practitioners who are looking for a well-rounded book study, a pre-service teacher who is learning the ropes, parents who are wanting to help their students, educational administrators, a professor who works in the education field, or even a high school or college student wanting to help build up their own learning. If you want to learn the meat and potatoes of scientifically proven learning approaches, then I recommend that you read this book.

About the Reviewer

Amanda Yentes is currently a second grade teacher at a small, high-poverty elementary school. She has taught kindergarten, first and second grade over the past nine years. Amanda is currently a PhD student at the University of Wyoming studying curriculum and instruction in literacy.



education review // reseñas educativas

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

editors: **gustavo e. fischman /
melissa cast-brede / gene v glass**

Supported by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University

 *Education Review/ Reseñas Educativas/ Resenhas Educativas* is supported by the edXchange initiative's Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*. Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and ***Education Review***, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or ***Education Review***. ***Education Review*** is published by the Scholarly Communications Group of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University.

Please contribute reviews at <http://www.edrev.info/contribute.html>.

Connect with *Education Review* on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Education-Review/178358222192644>) and on Twitter @EducReview