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Brief reviews for April 2008

Boyles, Nancy N. (2007). *That's a Great Answer: Teaching Literature Response to K-3, ELL, and Struggling Readers*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House.

Pages: 196 Price: \$27.95 ISBN: 978-1-934338-12-4

Nancy N. Boyles' *That's a Great Answer: Teaching Literature Response to K-3, ELL, and Struggling Readers* offers readers an interesting title, useful organization, and valuable information to assist the teacher in eliciting critical thinking responses from students. For the K-3 classroom teacher of ELL students who are often struggling to find meaning in text, the book presents many wonderful ways to work toward this worthy goal.

A strong element of this book is its clear organization. Boyles considered that all states are accountable to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. She chose that organization's framework to organize the book's broad objectives: forming general understanding, developing an interpretation, making reader/text connections, and examining content and structure. By including these particular objectives, Broyles shows awareness of the needs of today's teacher of struggling or ELL early readers. For example, Boyles includes identification of a lesson a character learned in a story. This is a simple thing to do for young students. Teaching a lesson, discussing its implications, and inviting students to apply the lesson or moral to their lives can all be accomplished in a short amount of time. Teachers check for understanding as this process is carried out. Broyles demonstrates her expertise through sensitivity to the challenges that today's teachers of struggling readers and ELL students face.

One of the most useful portions of the book is a rubric for assessing student oral and written response to comprehension questions. This rubric indicates beginning, developing, or accomplished levels with respect to accuracy, organization, thoroughness, and fluency. Boyles rightly includes these barometers of development, as these are indispensable skills for the student population the author seeks to serve. These emphasis areas are highly important for the savvy teacher to gauge progress in her students. The rubric is quick-to-use. It is a user-friendly tool to guide the on-going evaluation of student response to any piece of literature used in the classroom.

Another strength of this book is inclusion of abundant templates and tips for assisting the student in his effort to respond appropriately to text. The templates are easy to understand and lead directly to discussion and production of written samples. Template samples elicit student responses by asking such questions as: What would be another good title for this story? Or How did _____ solve her/his problem in the story? Template questionnaires include fill-in-the-blank forms with questions applicable to a variety of reading circumstances. The author also provides reading selection lists of popular children's books that may be used with each exercise. In other words, much of the work of searching for the right book to match desired skill development lessons has already been accomplished!

The author was successful in her attempt to impart valuable information for use by teachers of ELLs and struggling readers. As the student makeup of classrooms is increasingly diverse and the occurrence of struggling readers is almost universal, this book is a valuable resource for teachers who appreciate having a "quick-reference" to useful graphic organizer exercise pages. This impressive inventory of appropriate exercises may be copied for classroom use. This is one of the biggest benefits of the book. Teachers are prompted to ask: "How am I doing when I participate in a discussion?" and "What does a great book discussion look like in a classroom?" For Broyles, teacher introspection equals important teacher preparation

for teaching literature response.

The table of contents is clear and focused. Part I of the book, entitled Getting to Great Answers, offers ideas for teachers about great objectives, book choices, and excellent instruction, productive discussion, and encouraging excellent answers. Part II includes tips and exercise templates for meeting reading-comprehension objectives. The size and font of the text is pleasant and appropriately easy on the eyes. Teachers can save time and work by choosing applicable examples from this book for use with students. A compact disc inside the book cover makes it convenient for teachers to make copies of exercises for classroom use. This is a big "plus."

Any primary grade teacher who desires to introduce students, even struggling readers, to ways to respond to text that empower them from the earliest stages of reading comprehension development would benefit greatly from Boyles' book.

Reviewed by Barry Johnson, doctoral student, Texas A&M University-Kingsville

Broda, Herbert W. (2007). *Schoolyard-Enhanced Learning: Using the Outdoors as an Instructional Tool, K-8*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Pages: 182 Price: \$17.50 ISBN: 978-1571107299

Do we need to be concerned about children's lack of time in the outdoors? Can student learning be enriched by class time outdoors? Is student achievement improved with outdoor learning time? How can teachers go about moving classroom experiences outside?

These questions are part of a larger discussion about how children spend their time. A decline in time, opportunity, and inclination for children's outdoor learning and play has received media attention recently following the publication of another book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* by Richard Louv (2005). "Nature Deficit Sends Kids Down a Desolate Path" (Deardorff, 2006) and "Getting Lost in the Great Indoors; Many Adults Worry Nature is Disappearing From Children's Lives" (St. George, 2007) are media examples highlighting this topic.

Written at the same general time as Louv's book, *Schoolyard-Enhanced Learning* moves the discussion into the classroom. Herb Broda, a professor of curriculum and instruction at Ashland University in Ohio, wrote the book to inspire and help teachers develop outdoor learning activities for a variety of content areas.

As Broda describes, "Schoolyard-enhanced learning refers specifically to teaching activities that can take place right outside of the classroom. There is no need to arrange for a bus, or wait for field trip permission forms to be returned. You are just stepping outside." (Broda) The schoolyard differs from the playground in opportunities and structures for learning and class meetings. Instructional activities might include, for example, observation, reflection, and written descriptions for language arts classes, or applied problems in measurement for mathematics classes. Outdoor learning activities can be brief or longer and can be adapted for rural and urban schools.

This is a practical, enthusiastic, and optimistic book aimed at helping teachers include outdoor learning time as an instructional strategy in their courses. Broda outlines strategies, learning activities, potential problem areas, and offers a rationale for this type of instruction. He cites research linking a mix of indoor and outdoor instruction with increased student motivation. In the first chapter, he builds a rationale for learning outdoors in the context of current educational thought including place-based education, student engagement and motivation, constructivism and hands-on learning, and multiple intelligences. In following chapters he discusses creating outdoor learning spaces, the "nuts and bolts" of taking classes outside, and activities specific to process skills and content areas.

This book is relevant for classroom teachers, school administrators, preservice teachers in training as well as those interested in education, social, and environmental issues. It contributes, from an educator's perspective, to the current cross-disciplinary conversations about children, their activities, and the implications of those activities.

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Louv, Richard (2005). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.

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Reviewed by Laurel Haycock, University of Minnesota Libraries

Campbell, Kimberly Hill (2007). *Less is More: Teaching Literature with Short Texts—Grades 6-12*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Pages: 222 Price: \$18.50 ISBN: 978-1-57110-710-7

Campbell makes a case for using short texts in the middle and secondary school curriculums. Short texts serve as bridges and allow for more targeted instruction around themes, craft, genres, and specific strategies. Campbell's definition of short texts is wide, encompassing short stories, poems, essays, memoirs, picture books, and graphic novels. In addition to using excerpts from larger novels, Campbell encourages practitioners to consider short texts as teachable genres (p. 43); for example, she especially refers to short stories as a genre worthy of study in its own right.

Campbell cites many reasons why short texts should be used more in the classroom. They are more accessible and manageable because their shorter length and more compact content may lower frustration levels of students. In addition, the length of the short texts supports in-class reading — teachers are always struggling with the limited amount of instructional minutes they have in class to read with students. The nature of short texts is better equipped to deal with aliteracy in that students, especially struggling students, will be more motivated to read something shorter in length. Short texts, according to Campbell, may enhance interest in reading because they can offer more relevance. Short texts allow teachers to expose students to a variety of genres in a limited amount of time; short texts also provide both teachers and students with more reading choices and models for effective writing which translate into students writing more stories. Targeted instruction using short texts allows teachers to employ the texts as effective writing models. Campbell also states that the use of short texts can be a direct response to fake reading in which students pretend to read the assigned novels; the idea is that these texts are short enough for students to not have to pretend to read.

Campbell refers to short texts as the "great equalizer" (p. 5) because they provided a way for her to meet the varying reading abilities evident in her classrooms. She claims that short texts offered her more possibilities for differentiating. Although I can understand why she would reach such a conclusion, I thought that this point needed to have more support via stronger anecdotes or even empirical studies. Given today's demographics, there is a need for schools to better meet the diverse needs of our student populations; referring to short texts as the "great equalizer" without strong warrants seemed to minimize the difficulty of this task. In general, Campbell did not refer to academic studies to support her claims; however, this book is directed to a practitioner audience. In her defense, Campbell did cite how the use of short texts as effective writing models aligned with research on teaching adolescents to write; I wanted her to cite more research to corroborate her notion of short texts serving as the "great equalizer."

An attractive feature of Campbell's book is that it draws upon her own experiences as a teacher. As a result of her teaching, Campbell discovered that students responded better and more deeply to shorter texts. She also found that students read more. Campbell notes how she had to change her classroom practice and shift her thinking away from the dominance of the novel. Furthermore, Campbell suggests that teachers should focus less on reading levels and more on craft which can be done more easily using short texts. Campbell writes a teacher-friendly book in that she explains how she would teach in narrative form, describing specific examples from her own classroom experiences; this is especially effective for novice teachers and/or for teachers getting used to the idea of using short texts.

The organization of Campbell's book make it easy to use and serves as a reference tool. The chapters present short texts by genre. Each chapter includes an overview of the genre and a series of teaching strategies that help teachers analyze literary elements and craft. Campbell includes informal assessments and recommended texts throughout each chapter. Personally, I found her recommended texts to be the most

helpful; I want to read all of the mentioned works. She gives examples of texts for a variety of genres, noting specific purposes; for example, one list is labeled as "Short stories with interesting punctuation or style" (p. 66). Another list is labeled as "Memoirs with figurative language" (p. 135). These lists included seminal work and contemporary titles. I thought that Campbell did a really good job of including popular culture; for instance, she mentioned Oprah, Entertainment Weekly, etc. She also connected to the teen culture; she mentioned that Modest Mouse, an alternative rock group, drew their name from a Virginia Woolf story (p. 69). She cites popular movies that use literature and could be employed to garner student interest. In her last chapter, she also makes a case for graphic novels, which are very "hot" among teen readers. In doing so, Campbell relates to the student population served by this book. My one major suggestion in regard to these lists is that I would have liked to have seen more representation of Asian-Americans in the texts and/or texts written by Asian-Americans and other minority writers.

I was really impressed with Campbell's mentioning that middle and secondary school teachers should use picture books. This aligns with my own personal and professional beliefs about the positioning of children's literature in secondary classrooms. Campbell contends that picture books are valuable tools for English language learners and struggling readers. She also posits that these picture books serve the needs of all adolescent readers by giving them an opportunity to reconnect to their childhood and to why they like to read. These books are also accessible and as short texts, allow for more focused attention on literary elements and craft.

Overall, I would use this book in my practice as well as recommend it to my graduate students. It is useful and very practitioner-friendly.

Reviewed by Virginia S. Loh, a graduate of SDSU-USD's doctoral program; now an adjunct professor at National University and University of San Diego, an elementary school teacher, and a published children's book author with Candlewick Press.

Dalton, Stephanie Stoll (2008). *Five Standards for Effective Teaching: How to Succeed with All Learners, Grades K-8*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pages: 285 Price: \$24.95 ISBN: 978-0-7879-8093-1

Prepare to shake your world and that of your students. Drawing upon *Five Standards for Effective Teaching: How to Succeed with All Learners*, educators will be encouraged to totally redesign their classrooms from instructional practices to seating charts. This is not a quick reference book, but instead a great summer read for teachers who are struggling to maximize classroom productivity in light of increasing inclusivity. Drawing upon research conducted by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE), Dalton proposes five standards for effective teaching that provide sound strategies for dealing with today's challenging demographics. With the goal of helping teachers become facilitators of learning communities within their classrooms, these standards suggest to educators how to prepare their students to learn, thereby enabling them to take charge of their own learning.

The suggested "assisted teaching" model, is based on these five pedagogy standards:

1. Teacher and students producing together
2. Developing language and literacy
3. Connecting learning to students' lives
4. Teaching complex thinking
5. Teaching through conversation

The focus is on developing learning communities based on discourse because teacher-student and student-student discussion is essential to learning. Class time is spent rotating to varied work stations, with the teacher traveling between groups. Students are challenged to achieve at increasingly higher levels and the pedagogical stance demands that the curriculum be relevant to the students' lives.

It is one thing to say "this is how it ought to be" but yet another to actually provide the tools to do so. The strength of this book lies in the fact that the author provides practical advice on how to organize and conduct such a learning environment. I quickly adopted Dalton's ideas for developing a multi-tasking classroom environment. Her tips on drafting an effective "community agreement" have improved the quality of group work in my classes. I've also seen positive results from following her ideas on monitoring and rewarding student participation within the small group setting. Real-life examples of effective instruction combined with tips on class room time and space management compliment Dalton's instruction on how to transform centuries old, traditional practices into powerful forms that meet the needs of a vast array of learners.

Reviewed by Amy Larrison Gillan, science teacher, Southmont Junior High School, Crawfordsville, IN, and doctoral student, Science Curriculum and Instruction, Department of Education, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN. Area of research interest: environmental education, particularly ocean literacy and stewardship in landlocked classrooms.

Dierking, Connie Campbell (2007). *Teaching Early Writing and Reading Together, Mini-lessons that Link K-2 Literacy Instruction*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House.

Pages: 150 Price: \$23.95 ISBN: 978-1-934338-10-0

Elementary teachers use mini-lessons, often 3-4 in one day, as they teach the language arts block. Dierking provides reading and writing mini-lessons which intertwine the two areas of instruction in order to reinforce the literacy process. The mini-lesson instructions are displayed in an easy format which needs little preparation beyond what the primary teacher already has. In the first three chapters, the author provides teachers with background knowledge on the reciprocal development process of early writing and reading, the basics for creating a connected classroom and finally, the how-to's of teaching a writing/reading workshop.

The mini-lessons are categorized according to operational, print awareness, foundations, and craft — categories which were developed by Dierking and Sherra Jones to "insure a balance in K-2 writing instruction" (p. 50). Operational mini-lessons provide writers with skills needed to succeed in the writer's workshop such as setting goals, choosing pieces to publish, editing writing pieces, and communicating with partners. Print-awareness mini-lessons are exactly that: exposure to print through letters, sounds and words. Dierking points out that these mini-lessons provide students with abilities to move through the phonics continuum.

The final categories of mini-lessons, foundations and craft, "provide support for all writing" (p. 120) and "moving students' writing beyond basic proficiency," (p. 127) respectively. Various foundation mini-lessons include using pictures and words to tell a story, writing with a purpose, and labeling a diagram. Craft mini-lessons prepare the K-2 student with strategies to successfully raise their writing above the ordinary.

The author fulfills her goal of providing an assortment of mini-lessons to reinforce literacy processes. The simple mini-lesson format works well due to Dierking's commitment to provide a reading connection, materials needed and a prep step for each mini-lesson. In all, 52 mini-lessons are presented across the four categories; the mini-lesson format includes a five-step process of making a reading connection, teaching, active engagement, linking to future work, and follow up ideas. Experienced teachers who are feeling the need to change tactics might consider these simple techniques to facilitate smoother transitions in their literacy instruction.

Reviewed by Darryn Diuguid, a doctoral student at Saint Louis University in the Department of Educational Studies where he teaches elementary methods course in language arts and classroom management. He previously taught 2nd grade in a high poverty school district.

Fletcher, Ralph & Portalupi, JoAnn (2007). *Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8*. Second edition. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Pages: 192 Price: \$20.00 ISBN: 978-157110-706-0

The second edition of Ralph Fletcher and Joan Portalupi's *Craft Lessons, Teaching Writing K-8*, addresses teachers, instructors, and assistants in elementary school. This work presents a model that combines art, technique, and active learning, where teachers and students reciprocally discover the beauty of writing. Instead of following a pragmatic and fragmented "recipe-style" model, Fletcher and Portalupi captivate their readers' minds, organizing content in the writing and teaching process into two principal clusters, by grade (K-2, 3-4, and 5-8) and by skill-specific relevance. According to the authors, writing is a developmental process that can be taught using mini-lessons that include a variety of intellectual and visual techniques. Such instruction will tremendously help K-8 writers as well as teachers.

Methodologically, the book has a simple yet substantial structure to guide teachers in the instructional process. For each grade level group, a discussion describing the main teaching objectives is briefly presented, followed by how-to teaching ideas, a short list of literature references, and alternative texts. Fletcher and Portalupi propose ideas that can be adapted to the needs of the student group according to learning styles and specific interest. The suggestions about how to teach writing skills are explicitly communicated in everyday classroom language. The craft lessons can be taught either individually or in

small groups. The editors include a useful "Questions and Answers" section to exemplify common difficulties for teachers who are not well versed in teaching writing.

From the beginning, the reader intuits the harmony and coherence of the experts. For example, the authors present five key factors affecting students' writing skills: a) time—continued and permanent practice, b) response—indispensable to dialogue between teachers and writers, c) responsibility—promoting student engagement in their personal writing process, d) the writer's notebook, e) the literature, the development of student self-awareness to rediscover themselves, and the world through writing. Teachers need to keep those factors in mind and incorporate them in their daily planning lessons.

This text includes twenty three themes which are considered most relevant in the teaching of writing. Among them, six may increase student's motivational attitude toward writing: pacing, imagery, dialogue and monologue, irony and symbolism. These themes open a vast socio-psychological universe waiting to be discovered, conquered and expressed by potential writers. In addition, the authors insist that "four substantive elements are required in good writing: ideas, design, language, and presentation" (p. 125).

This book is a valuable resource for teachers' libraries. The straightforwardness of the themes demonstrates the wisdom of experience, self criticism and methodological knowledge. The well organized structure permits teachers to adapt content to grade level and level of writing complexity. Finally, the ideas, methods, and techniques of *Craft Lessons* while addressed to mainstream classrooms, would also be valuable for ESL/EFL teachers and professionals in special education. Experts, researchers, and professional writers will find the children's written voice to be an inspiration. This book attests to the notion that writing is the activity that all human beings can utilize to unveil that which is inside.

Reviewed by A. A. Saucedo-Medina, Graduate Research Assistant in Bilingual Education Doctoral Program at Texas A& M-Kingsville.

McGrath, Mary Jo (2006). *School Bullying: Tools to Avoid Harm and Liability*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Pages: 248 Price: \$72.95(hardcover); \$33.95(paperback) ISBN: 781412915717(hardcover); 9781412915724(paperback)

Almost 30% of youth in the United States (or over 5.7 million) are estimated to be involved in bullying as either a bully, a target of bullying, or both. In a recent national survey of students in grades 6-10, 13% reported bullying others, 11% reported being the target of bullies, and another 6% said that they bullied others and were bullied themselves. Bullying is increasingly viewed as an important contributor to youth violence, including homicide and suicide. Case studies of the shooting at Columbine High School and other U.S. schools have suggested that bullying was a factor in many of the incidents (National Institutes of Health, 2001).

To address these statistics, The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, which is part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, provides vital federal support to promote school safety. House Resolution 284 (U.S. House, 2005) requires schools and districts: to include within their discipline policies prohibitions against bullying and harassment, establish complaint procedures for students or parents who seek to complain regarding bullying or harassment (which procedures must include identification of a designated school official responsible for receiving complaints and timelines the district will follow in the resolution of the complaints), and provide annual notice to parents, students, and staff regarding policies and procedures prohibiting bullying and harassment. This legislation, which mandates schools have anti-bullying policies and programs, is supported by Mary Jo McGrath's book, *School Bullying: Tools for Avoiding Harm and Liability*. As a school law attorney with over 30 years of experiences, her focus is employee and student misconduct, with an emphasis on illegal harassment and bullying.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first, "Fact, Myth, and Impact," begins by defining what is bullying behavior and what it is not. One can determine how a bully acts by noting: the intent to harm; an imbalance of power; the perpetrator's enjoyment of the bullying; and the repeated, systematic behavior. Bullying is classified into the three categories of physical, emotional, and relational bullying.

As the book continues, the author shifts the focus to the victim. She addresses the physical and emotional impact of bullying, the signs and symptoms, and the long-term effects. The six practices that a school can implement to reveal and identify bullying behavior are: 1) be observant and document, 2) encourage students to report, 3) be on the "lookout," 4) listen and report, 5) watch for signs, and 6) provide close supervision. Students have a code of silence — do not tell because things will get worse for you, and the adult will not do

anything anyway. In combating bullying, the entire school community including the parents must be involved. Two characteristics that teachers and administrators must develop are to be a safe adult, someone who takes the victims seriously, and to be a responsive adult, one who monitors the situation, follows up. Part one concludes with a look at two current trends of the bully: social scheming and techno bullying.

Part two begins with a discussion of the legal context. Focus is on the variety of laws: civil action, criminal law, and administrative law, under which school employees or districts must work. The definitions examine liability, negligence, and discrimination from the viewpoint of the school. To assist educators in determining what makes student misconduct legally actionable, McGrath shifts from the facts of bullying to the impact on the school community, leading to a Five-Point Criterion. This Criterion asks: is a protected class involved, is the behavior welcomed or unwanted; is the behavior severe or persistent or pervasive; is the behavior interfering with the student's education; and does the behavior meet both subjective and objective tests related to its level of interference with the student's education?

Given that the majority of an administrator's professional life is dedicated to complaint resolution, the final section of the book introduces the daily practices needed to conquer bullying. The communication and complaint resolution aspects of daily school life are addressed through the use of the McGrath's SUCCEED System. The system provides practical tools to use with bullying complaints. Incorporated in the system is the law. According to McGrath "the SUCCEED System is everything you need to account for in the following the law, including just cause and due process" (p. 69). This legally sound system possesses the ability to "organize fundamental legal and ethical principles into a powerful methodology for resolving and transforming complex human situations" (p. 70-71).

The system's steps of constructive thinking, listening, and speaking will aid school leaders in deciding on effective action. When taking action she advocates the FICA Standard, an acronym which she explains as: one would also employ the Facts with Trust, the Impact with Respect, the Context with Understanding and the appropriate step of Action with Growth. The book concludes with a step-by-step approach for handling bullying from the complaint to the investigation. The players and their roles in this process are identified. McGrath also provides a collection of resources to use to implement the program.

With the discrepancy of reported bullying and the perception of bullying between administrators and teachers (Harris & Hathorn, 2006) coupled with the requirements of House Resolution. 284, this book is a very timely and appropriate resource tool for educators and administrators. It could be used as a systematic guide to steer through the legal waters surrounding bullying in schools. Using the book, as a springboard for discussion of procedures and policies regarding bullying in a school district would increase consistency in this area. The school community would implement practices with the same expectation, goals, and commitment. McGrath refers to the SUCCEED Standard as an "understood" procedure. More time could be spent discussing this framework before adding the elements of FICA. However, using the book as its title states, as a "tool" would be sufficient in directing the discussion, planning a policy, and implementing procedures in the area of bullying and harassment in the school setting.

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Reviewed by Kim Haney, a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma in the department of Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum. Specifically, Ms. Haney's area of interest is classroom relationships, and the part that teachers play on the development of student-student relationships.

Phelps, Richard P. (2007). *Standardized Testing Primer*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Pages: 156 Price: \$18.95 ISBN: 978-0-8204-9741-9

All individuals involved in the world of educational assessment know the importance of standardized testing

and its impact on education. However, in *Standardized Testing Primer*, Richard Phelps exposes that standardized testing is both controversial and complex and is found "dispassionately or technically" difficult by many (pg. 1). Nevertheless, it is a public issue and policy-makers as well as citizens the world over can and do make decisions affecting the character and use of standardized tests. What is standardized testing, what is the value and purpose of standardized testing, and what is the demand of standardized testing? These are issues that are discussed first and foremost in an attempt to ease the controversy, complexity and difficulty of standardized testing.

To answer the question of what is standardized testing, Phelps discusses multiple-choice items, performance-based tests, latent mental traits, and prompts. The value and purpose of standardized testing is introduced by discussing such terms as representative sample, norm-referenced tests, standards-based tests and content standards. The demand for standardized testing is nothing new to those involved in public education. Being both useful and popular, it is not surprising that parents are stronger advocates than non-parents of standardized educational testing with consequences (e.g., high-stakes). Phelps supports this with summaries of public opinions on high-stakes testing requirements among education consumers (e.g., students, parents, the public) and producers (e.g., teachers, administrators).

As popular as they are, standardized tests have been around for a very long time. These tests are able to serve a dual purpose of measuring both aptitude and achievement. The historical paths and origins of educational achievement and aptitude testing are discussed for readers. Phelps helps educators understand qualitative characteristics that make tests different such as norms, criteria, standards, and stakes along with the structures of educational testing programs and assessment systems. Phelps also discusses the variation from country to country regarding how tests are used and which types of test are used.

In order to better help educators come to terms with the importance of standardized testing, court decisions regulating test use and debates among education researchers is illustrated. Chapter 3 reveals the effects of standardized testing, the responses that these effects have drawn, and the implications for testing system structure. One topic of interest is that of test coaching and teaching to the test. This topic is a rather popular one for both in-service teachers and pre-service teachers as it could serve as a complement to discussions in the measurement and evaluation courses in teacher education programs.

As an additional enhancement to measurement and evaluation courses in education, chapter 4 discusses many of the issues discussed with all teachers. Validity, including content, curricular, criterion, concurrent, construct, and consequential is described in detail that helps the reader differentiate between the similarities of the terms. Additional terms discussed include reliability, the test development process including test specifications, test frameworks, test blueprints, test assembly, test items, item writing, item formats (e.g., selected-response format and constructed-response items, higher-order, projective tests), test directions, and field testing. Phelps also discusses item analysis which is essential to all test producers and consumers. Item analysis provides information relative to each test item including item difficulty, also known as the p-value, item discrimination, also known as the point-biserial, and differential item functioning (DIF).

Another important topic for test producers and consumers is that of test administration and scoring. Because administration and scoring of standardized testing are so important, it is crucial that testing conditions (i.e., administration and scoring) remain as consistent as possible. Any variation could affect performance and therefore, testing environments and scoring procedures should be designed with as little variation as achievable. This is a topic that is extremely important for teachers to be aware of.

Phelps also provides a useful test quality checklist to determine if a test is of good quality. If a test is of good quality, then test developers should be able to answer questions such as what is the purpose of the test, is there adequate evidence of validity, assuring that test scores are meaningful, are test scores reliable, with minimal measurement error, and are the conclusions drawn from the test scores fair to all students. This checklist could serve as a guide for schools looking to adopt new programs or assessments within their districts.

As a supplement to this book, Phelps provides a well defined list of other primers including some reference books on assessment as well as references and other print resources, and nonprint resources and journals.

In conclusion, this book would be beneficial for all teachers, especially new ones, parents, and administrators. Especially helpful, it provides a glossary of terms at the end of each chapter. It will assist readers in understanding the importance of standardized educational testing and improve their ability to interpret and use the results produced by these tests. Furthermore, instructors of educational measurement and evaluation might find this book useful as a supplemental text when covering the topic of standardized testing.

Reviewed by Melanie L. Shores, Ph.D., The University of Alabama at Birmingham, Assistant Professor of Human Studies. Interests include measurement, program evaluation, mathematics education, and gender issues.

Pianta, Robert C.; La Paro, Karen M. & Hamre, Bridget K. (2008). *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Manual K-3*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Pages: 109 Price: \$49.95 ISBN: 978-1-55766-942-1

Research has suggested that teachers make the difference in whether students realize their academic potential or fail to achieve academically (see e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2000; Sanders, Wright & Horn, 1997). The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) act has highlighted the important role of teachers in students' academic success by mandating the presence of "highly qualified teachers" in U.S. classrooms. While NCLB's focus on the credentials of teachers may be one element in improving the quality of public education in the U.S., numerous scholars have questioned whether the law's definition of a highly qualified teacher is appropriately comprehensive (see e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Apple, 2007). The *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Manual K-3* offers an alternative approach to improving students' academic and social development by focusing on what teachers do in classrooms.

The CLASS is an observation instrument that was created to assess the classroom quality of preschool through third-grade classrooms. CLASS has been used in numerous large-scale studies, all of which are detailed in the manual, that provide evidence that classrooms with higher scores on the CLASS have students who make greater academic and social progress during the school year.

The *CLASS Manual K-3* was written to provide background information on the development of the instrument and to explain procedures for using the CLASS in K-3 classrooms. The audience for the manual includes teachers, administrators, researchers, evaluators, and consultants. The CLASS assesses the quality of classrooms by examining teacher interactions with students across three domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. The manual successfully explains the theoretical and research rationale for the inclusion of these domains and does so in language that is accessible both to seasoned researchers and elementary classroom practitioners alike.

Following this introduction to the instrument, the manual provides specific information regarding use of the CLASS. This section covers diverse scenarios in which the instrument could be used (live or recorded classrooms, classrooms with one or two teachers, etc.) and presents the specific procedures necessary for using the instrument, especially focusing on coding each dimension during classroom observations. A strength of this section is the inclusion of specific examples of teacher behaviors that are indicative of the three dimensions and that aid the observer in accurately coding teacher interactions.

Although the CLASS manual adequately explains the procedures for using the instrument, there is one area of concern with the use of the instrument by school personnel. Because the observer using the CLASS must make high inference conclusions regarding the extent to which the dimensions are characteristic of the classroom, maintaining objectivity throughout an observation may be difficult. This issue may be especially problematic when the CLASS is used by school administrators or teachers to observe teaching colleagues. Preconceived notions of the teacher's ability to teach or the behavior of the students within that teacher's class could color an observer's coding on the CLASS and skew, either positively or negatively, the results. For this reason, the manual's authors highlight the importance of extensive training focused on the use of the instrument. The extent to which school districts would be willing to dedicate resources to widespread training, however, is unknown.

Even though the use of the CLASS by school personnel presents this concern, the CLASS and its accompanying manual offer classroom educators many benefits. In a time when teachers may feel increasing pressure to focus only on relaying critical content information to students, this observation system acknowledges the importance of teacher interactions in the classroom, especially for young children. Rather than focusing on educational outputs, such as students' test scores, the manual explains how observations using the CLASS can provide teachers with meaningful information regarding classroom-level inputs. In other words, results from observations with the CLASS allow teachers to see their areas of strength as well as pinpointing specific teacher behaviors that need to be changed or modified in order to improve classroom practice and positively influence the academic and social development of elementary students.

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Reviewed by Brooke Kandel-Cisco, Research assistant & doctoral student, Texas A&M University. Her research focuses on literacy instruction with second language learners, the professional development of teachers who work with English language learners, and appropriate instructional practices for bilingual/ESL classrooms.

Serravallo, Jennifer & Goldberg, Gravity (2007) *Conferring with Readers: Supporting Each Student's Growth and Independence*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pages: 224 Price: \$23.00 ISBN: 978-0-325-01101-1

There is much good sense to be found in the new book, *Conferring with Readers*, by Jennifer Serravallo & Gravity Goldberg. It reads as a detailed, almost step-by-step guide for elementary school teachers on how to improve the "independent reading" practices of students in a classroom.

The authors are former elementary school teachers who currently work as staff developers with the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University, working closely with Lucy Calkins, among others. In this role, the authors move from school to school, coaching teachers on how to conduct readers' workshops, based on a model developed by Lucy Calkins, and also influenced by that of Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. *Conferring with Readers* serves as a veritable handbook for the part of readers' workshop that focuses on independent reading.

Each chapter presents a theoretical or practical aspect of conferring with readers in a readers' workshop. For example, one chapter discusses the layout for a classroom that lends itself to readers' workshop. Key to this setup is a large classroom library with minutely leveled books, to better facilitate matching each student with a "just right" book. The authors suggest it is possible to level books according to any of several recommended leveling guides, but throughout the book, the book levels published by Fountas & Pinnell are used as examples.

Conferring with Readers represents an important contribution to the literature. The greatest resource in the book is the wealth of sensitive and powerful suggestions the authors make for assessing the reading abilities and progress of students, ranging from pulling students aside, one by one, in order to conduct a running record as developed by Marie Clay, to other forms of assessment that are less intrusive to the on-going independent reading of students in the classroom. There is no doubt that assessing students when they are reading silently is a difficult task. In fact, in schools where I have taught, teachers felt pressure, and ultimately decided to eliminate silent reading from the classroom schedule altogether, perhaps for precisely this reason. Silent reading can also be squeezed from the schedule by encroaching "content standards," and the often difficult task of insisting that students use silent reading time for silently reading. Work in other literacy forms, such as on grammar, writing, and read alouds, predominate in many middle childhood classrooms. Serravallo & Goldberg strongly defend the importance of leading independent reading sessions in the classroom, and show how it is possible to guide readers toward independence and greater comprehension. Reading assessment tools and imaginative ways of tracking evidence, along with rubrics for evaluation, are the primary tools offered in this book, which may allow teachers to reach this goal.

Serravallo & Goldberg advocate several forms of intervention, before or during a sustained silent reading period in the classroom, to help students improve their reading abilities. First, the authors present a method of conferencing with individual students, where teachers closely observe a student reading, and then stop the reader and offer compliments and suggestions. In this model, the teacher keeps detailed notes about each student and often refers to past conferences. The teacher checks in on how the particular skill taught during the previous conference has been used by the reader, and requests a demonstration by the student. Then, she offers several new strategies for improving reading comprehension.

Another method of teaching reading comprehension suggested in *Conferring with Readers* is presented in whole class lessons, often before an independent reading session begins. In these lessons the teacher presents particular challenges students face as readers, and strategies for approaching those challenges. For example, the authors suggest that teachers demonstrate ways of understanding unknown words, such as looking at the illustration for clues, or trying out meanings of words that might make sense in the context of the sentence and paragraph. Finally, Serravallo & Goldberg discuss small group lessons, where teachers are encouraged to gather a table of readers together to discuss a particular reading strategy, or confer with a small group of students in the midst of discussing a book, and offer suggestions on how to improve the conversation and comprehension of the book.

There are several ways *Conferring with Readers* could have been a stronger book. The clear underlying assumption of the method is that when readers struggle, or resist reading, it is because they do not have the skills necessary to move to the "next level" of fiction chapter books. Indeed, research suggests reading ability plays a critical role in whether readers persist. However, ability is not everything. One important element missing from the analysis, and the practical applications suggested, is the powerful role identity and relationships play in motivation to read. The lack of this critical analysis became apparent when I realized that almost all of the examples of the children's books used in *Conferring with Readers* were fiction chapter books written by white authors, and featuring female lead characters. This is problematic on several levels. For example, the favored reading options for many boys — and research shows boys struggle more with reading than girls — are often non-fiction books, and books featuring male main characters. For students of color, books featuring multicultural characters, and set in urban environments are often more compelling. *Conferring with Readers* would be providing a greater service if it had included serious attention to issues of culture and identity.

Related to this, in my teaching and research, I have found that "independent" reading is, in many ways, a social activity. Students almost always want to talk about books if they find the books personally compelling, and often the most effective way of "turning kids on" to new books is if peers recommend books to other peers. There was very little attention paid in *Conferring with Readers* to the social elements that are often central motivating factors for students who enjoy reading. In fairness, the emphasis on teacher-to-student conferences and personal interaction does acknowledge the powerful impact a trusting teacher-student relationship can have on student reading habits. Students can be motivated to read because they know they can cultivate a relationship with their teacher around issues found in the book, or even reading ability more generally. However, the recommended "scripts" for these conferences are very brief, and feature teacher directives toward the students, not a friendly give-and-take that is likely to build on the interests of the student. The examples of students reading and discussing a particular book together were important, but hardly discussed in this book.

In *Conferring with Readers*, Serravallo & Goldberg advocate allowing students to read only books in the narrow level of reading difficulty at which students have been assessed. The authors even suggest ways of telling eager students, those who deeply yearn to read a book "above" his or her level, that they are not allowed to do so. This rigidity may be counterproductive to allowing students to use books as tools for cultivating relationships, especially with peers not assessed at the same reading level. The problem of rigidly keeping readers at their assessed level is especially acute for students who strongly prefer either non-fiction or multicultural books. Unfortunately, there are simply not enough high quality multicultural books published and widely available, including those featuring male characters, or biographies of popular role-models, for example, at every reading level. While I understand the concern that students who read "above" their assessed level may become frustrated, the downsides may outweigh the upside, and surely teachers can find ways to scaffold reading comprehension and lessen the degree of frustration students may be feeling. What is important is that students practice reading, and that they understand enough to discuss the book in a socially safe and enriching setting. Greatly limiting the choice of reading materials based on a fine-toothed assessment of reading ability and leveled books may do more harm than good.

Despite these shortcomings, *Conferring with Readers* offers many useful suggestions for how teachers can: assess students, match students to appropriate books, orchestrate a classroom culture that highly values independent reading, and create opportunities to offer specific and helpful lessons to students based on sensitive assessment and a clear theory of how students progress in their reading comprehension.

Reviewed by Matthew Knoester, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Smith, Michael W. & Wilhelm Jeffrey D. (2007). *Getting it Right: Fresh Approaches to Teaching Grammar, Usage, and Correctness*. New York: Scholastic.

Pages: 181 Price: \$21.99 ISBN: 9780439669337

Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm present the premise that our old ways of teaching grammar, usage, and correctness are not working and, therefore, need to be revisited in the context of students' writing and understanding. They give detailed advice and suggestions for lessons on three critical issues: how to identify which terms students need to know; which errors matter most and how to analyze the causes of the errors; and how to teach deeply through activities that help students inquire into the effects of language use.

Unless you are a writing teacher, the detail given the topic may not seem relevant. However, since the purpose of grammar instruction is to guarantee communication that is clear and representative of intent, it becomes evident that most teachers are teachers of grammar, usage, and correctness and could benefit from the findings of research and good practice.

It is interesting to reflect on the authors' statement that the teaching of grammar, usage, and correctness has evolved to a more relevant experience — less driven by workbooks where lessons had students correcting sentences unrelated to their creative works — because workbook activity remains in the mainstream of many programs. Research has validated that when grammar is isolated from a student's composition, it loses relevance, yet many such lessons exist. Though we know that learning may be impeded if grammar instruction is left until the last stages of writing, we often wait until that stage to mark the errors of a work, thus leaving the student with the thought that it was the errors for which we were looking.

The authors say the relevance of student error should be taken into consideration as not all errors are of equal importance or distort clarity to the same degree. If we are too heavy of pen, the student may revert to more simplistic, less descriptive writing and lose the momentum of the creative endeavor. The ultimate call is for teachers to become researchers of students' learning performances and their own teaching.

Debate remains over issues related to grammar and how it should be taught, especially the when, where and how issues. Differences also exist because people mean different things when they use the term grammar in their discussions. Smith and Wilhelm address both the debate and the differences and provide readers with ideas for helping the student writer see the value of his understanding of the principles of grammar and helping teachers develop fresh approaches for their teaching. The inclusion of lists of common errors and proper usage are of special value to both student and teacher.

The ideas of how instruction can be integrated through the writing process are supported with research and made practical by the lessons and strategies presented. Teachers interested in helping their students become better communicators will find this book to be informative and filled with ideas for teaching.

Reviewed by Kathy Fite, Texas State University-San Marcos.

Thomas-Presswood, Tania & Presswood, Donald (2008). *Meeting the Needs of Students and Families from Poverty: A Handbook for School and Mental Health Professional*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Pages: 234 Price: \$29.95 ISBN: 978-1-55766-867-7

Thomas-Presswood and Presswood set out to dispel current misconceptions about children and families of poverty and they succeeded in doing so, not only for school and mental health professionals, but for sociologists, psychologists and others whose work will benefit from a better understanding of this segment of our population. By establishing the direct link between school children's socio-economic status and their academic success, the authors have written a text that will equip educators to better serve children who are too easily funneled into special education classes.

The book begins with the aim of educating the reader on "the dynamics of poverty and its deleterious effect on children and families" (p. 3). The effect that poverty has on families' and children's physical, socio-emotional, and educational development is echoed throughout the book, sometimes a bit too repetitiously, but perhaps necessary for emphasis.

In the first chapter the authors do an excellent job of highlighting diverse descriptions of poverty to set the stage for a discussion of how children and families get to be defined as poor. Their review of the literature on poverty confirms that educators' pre-conceived notions about children of poverty as being less academically able than their peers cause them to have lower expectations of the students' academic performance. Studies have shown that children will fulfill teachers' prophecies of both high and low academic expectations (Rist, 1970). In a country where hard work is considered to be the sole means of escaping poverty, school children

from poor families are penalized for what is perceived to be their families' decision to stay in poverty. But the authors argue that "the American dream of going from rags to riches" is not that simple (p. 7).

Although poverty knows no color (p. 8), non-Caucasian people are overrepresented among the poor, hence the overrepresentation of their children in special education classes. Thomas-Presswood & Presswood remind the reader that slavery, prejudice and Jim Crow laws have led to higher rates of poverty among African-Americans and Native-Americans. They also address the vicious cycle of poverty by linking level of education and poverty. They show how schools are implicated in a system that maintains the poverty cycle by denying students equal access to financial and human resources. The authors convince the reader that schools are indirectly failing children of poverty by referencing the fact that many schools receive funds based on property taxes. They argue that "schools that predominantly educate children from a background of poverty struggle to meet the children's needs because of the limited funding these schools receive" (p. 116). The authors cite a 2002 National Research Council Report which reveals that schools serving children of poverty do not have the same per pupil expenditure as those in more affluent neighborhoods (p. 116). They support their argument with information from a 2001 U.S. Department of Education Report that shows how limited funding affects quality of teachers, equipment and instructional materials and condition of school buildings and classrooms to name a few.

To further their examination of various factors that impact children of poverty, the authors discuss the link between environmental factors and brain development and how these impact children's cognitive and behavioral development. They explain how the environment in which fetal developmental occurs can affect brain development. These factors could include toxic agents that lead to physical deformities and minor impairments like learning disabilities. Poverty ensures that a child will be exposed to environmental risk factors and the authors address how these, in turn, affect school performance. Thomas-Presswood & Presswood conclude that schools will continue to fail children of poverty until they understand the ways environmental factors affect their development.

The authors do not just paint a picture of gloom and doom, but include practical solutions for comprehensive individualized assessment of children from poverty. They advocate for non-discriminatory assessment practices especially in the face of the reality of overidentification and overplacement in special education programs of children from economically disadvantaged groups. Chapter four offers psychologists and others who evaluate children, assessment strategies that will lead to more effective identification of children's needs, and interventions that take children's diverse backgrounds and experiences into consideration. When school officials recognize the effect of background and experience on school performance, they are able reach all students more effectively.

In order to help school officials explore a non-traditional approach to assessing children of poverty with learning needs, the authors also include the Comprehensive Individualized Assessment System (CIAS), an assessment model that takes the unique needs and experiences of children living in poverty into consideration. It is no longer enough to administer the same battery of tests to every child with learning needs without regard to the child's environment. The authors assert that they cannot stress enough — for any assessment, diagnosis or intervention to succeed, the various systems a child inhabits, and which shape who he or she is, should be examined.

In addition to examining children's needs and experiences and taking into consideration how these impact the choice of assessment tools, the reader learns that it is imperative that one conduct social-emotional and behavioral assessment as well. Thomas-Presswood & Presswood suggest that "children who live in abject poverty and whose day-to-day lives unfold in environments characterized by chronic deprivation are at risk for developing emotional and behavioral difficulties" (p. 96). They therefore include "effective practices in assessing the social-emotional and behavioral health of children of poverty" (p. 96). The result of an effective assessment process is "accurate data on which to make instructional and programming decisions that can improve the educational lives of children" (p. 114).

The reader will enjoy this well-written text that progresses from setting the stage for an understanding of the problem — that children of poverty are misunderstood and overrepresented in special education programs — to offering educational strategies and practices that can improve academic success and retention among these children. Among their suggestions are early intervention, promoting literacy and numeracy skills, and diversifying instructional strategies. When these techniques are implemented, then the cycle of poverty is likely to be broken by students who will later have access to opportunities that their parents did not have.

In conclusion, I believe the authors succeed in keeping the reader's focus on the socio-political conditions that create inequalities in schooling, low teacher expectation, inadequate housing and healthcare — all factors that foster the vicious cycle that families of poverty find challenging to escape. But the light at the end of the tunnel is an educational system that can educate all children by acknowledging that although there

are a variety of family backgrounds, education should be the great equalizer.

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Reviewed by Chinwe Okpalaoka, doctoral candidate in the School of Educational Policy and Leadership, College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University. Her areas of interest include immigrant education, ethnic identity development and curriculum reform.

Walser, Nancy & Chauncey, Caroline, Editors (2007) *Spotlight on Leadership and School Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing.

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Schools are constantly evolving to meet legislative demands for continuous academic growth and attainment among the student population. Of the various pertinent elements — curriculums, instructional practices, remediation programs, discipline procedures, and faculty members — required to achieve these imperative tasks, effective leadership is most essential. School leaders (i.e., principals, superintendents, directors, etc.) must be change agents, innovative thinkers, and motivators for their students and staff. They must foster an environment that is safe and culturally conscious, encourage community involvement, delegate effectively, and ensure best practices are incorporated into classroom instruction and discipline. To assist school leaders execute these diverse rolls efficiently, *Spotlight on Leadership and School Change* features twenty stories from the *Harvard Education Letter* — a bimonthly newsletter published at the Harvard Graduation School of Education — Spotlight Series that demonstrates the positive impact effective leadership can have on the academic development of a school's student population.

Written by different authors, the book's enlightening articles are divided into five parts. Part I contains articles that focus on methods for improving instruction. The strengths and limitations of online professional development are discussed, and principals are encouraged to implement Montgomery County Public Schools' comprehensive teacher evaluation system that is based on student performance, professional development, teacher standards, and peer reviews. The text advocates schedule adjustments to capitalize instructional time and allow teacher collaboration, and encourages superintendents to use "grand rounds" — a medical concept in which physicians meet to discuss the treatment of their patients — to diagnose instructional deficits and support school administrators.

School assessment and accountability are the focus of Part II. Leaders are informed about the "Data Wise" Improvement Process which can be used to effectively train teachers to analyze test data. Data findings are used to examine instruction, develop a school improvement plan, and monitor progress. The remainder of this section discusses the significance and shortcomings of various forms of assessment (i.e., formative, summative, criterion, etc.).

Articles in Part III highlight the impact diversity has on academic achievement. Authors in this section help leaders understand the influence environment has on shaping the behaviors displayed and achievement obtained by students attending their schools. The section addresses misconceptions concerning the achievement gap between black and white students, and the impact socioeconomic deprivation has on student advancement. "Ableism" — prejudice against individuals with a disability — is defined and a call for its elimination in the school setting is stressed. Lastly, it discusses prejudices imposed on homosexual, bisexual, and transgender students within school environments.

Part IV emphasizes the importance of adequate school community relations. It provides school leaders with innovative ideas that will get stakeholders involved in issues that greatly impact students' emotional development and academic achievement. They learn to partner with community members to build student resiliency, develop after school programs, and reduce peer pressure.

Articles in Part V highlight issues of change that can be difficult for school leaders. There are pointers on the type of leadership skills required to engage in collective bargaining with district unions. Leaders are made aware of complacency which is common in classrooms of affluent high-scoring schools. Finally, leaders are cautioned about embracing change wholeheartedly. It is important to review programs carefully before adopting and implementing them. A final point is a discussion of flaws in the average yearly progress requirement under No Child Left Behind. Leaders need to set realistic goals of achievement without interfering

with progress.

Spotlight on Leadership and School Change provides valuable information that will assist leaders in maximizing students' learning potential and teachers' professional growth opportunities. While I can appreciate the brief insightful articles, each merely skims the surface of important educational issues. It fails to give pertinent details that school leaders may need to effectively implement the procedures, practices, and programs discussed in the articles.

Reviewed by Chastity Wilson, a doctoral student in the Department of Special Education at Southern University A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She is a middle school special education teacher and a member of the Research Association of Minority Professors.



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