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DiMartino, Joseph A. & Wolk, Denise L. (Eds.) (2010) *The Personalized High School: Making Learning Count for Adolescents*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

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Reviewed by Diana Gutierrez
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In *The Personalized High School: Making Learning Count for Adolescents*, DiMartino and Wolk have put together a book that provides a fresh look at high school reform through the first-person accounts of people who have lived through the experience and in the process transformed high school education in their communities. Navigating the waters of change is not easy, particularly in the current era of accountability. Yet, reading about those who have not only navigated the rough seas of educational reform, but have also conquered uncharted territory to become successful change agents is inspiring. DiMartino and Wolk's choice of stories is no accident but rather is born of experience and a dogged belief in secondary redesign.

The editors have extensive experience in high school redesign, both having been a part of the Secondary School

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Redesign Program of the Education Alliance at Brown University, DiMartino serving as director for nearly a decade and Wolk serving as a program associate. As the founder and president of the Center for Secondary School Redesign, Inc. (CSSR), DiMartino has created a program that provides groundbreaking assistance and support in secondary school redesign. Wolk is senior program associate and director of publications and communications at Education for Social Responsibility, an organization whose main purpose is to help educators create safe, caring, productive learning environments. Both editors' passion for high school redesign is apparent in the content of the book.

The book is divided into three parts with a total of eight different accounts from schools across the country. Each part has a different overarching theme: the student as an individual, curriculum and instruction, and leadership. Part One: Personalizing Your School Environment starts the account with stories of Granger High School in Granger, Washington and Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School in Devens, Massachusetts. Through the voice of Granger High School's Principal, the reader learns how the implementation of a student/teacher advisory program built a support system that connected the school with students and families. Meanwhile in Massachusetts, personalization occurred through extensive personal learning plans that engaged students through goal setting supported by teachers and parents.

Part Two: Sowing the Seeds for Change tells the stories of three schools who personalized learning through curriculum and instruction. First, New Technology High School in Napa, California, allows students to go beyond the usual limits of traditional education through project based learning in a school designed to educate students in the 21st century. Next, Minnesota New Country School in Henderson, Minnesota, personalizes instruction through an online management system whose function is to lead students through interest-driven projects. Finally, School of the Future, in New York, New York, has implemented an exhibition process that deepens the learning process alternative assessment.

Part Three: Sowing the Seeds of Change brings into focus the leadership aspect of high school redesign. The trials of

a principal newly assigned to Madison High School in San Diego, California, and the difficulties encountered in transforming a school with a climate made hostile by the teachers begins the section. Next, at the Boston Arts Academy in Boston Massachusetts, professional learning communities have helped create an environment in which innovation and autonomy abound. The last account in the section and book is that of Front Range Early College High School in Denver, Colorado. Combining the “Big Picture” school designs chosen by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and rigorous and personalized learning has given the students at Front Range the opportunity to take the lead in directing their own education with project planning, internships and exhibitions.

The power of the first-person account is felt in the passion with which the educators relate their stories and through the personal accounts of students who achieved success because of the transformation process. This combination serves as inspiration for change agents who are implementing or considering the implementation of secondary school redesign. But the usefulness of the book goes beyond the inspirational. There are many samples of the actual paperwork and plans used at the schools that can be used as templates. Furthermore, each account is accompanied by discussion questions and a complete bibliography at the end of the section, allowing for the possibility of using the source for a book study or as a text for university coursework for administrators.

Of the accounts the one that stands out is that of Madison High School. The power of the first person voice resonates through Virginia Eves’ recounting of the struggle to turn around a school mired in dysfunction and underachievement perpetuated by teachers. When she tells of receiving a dead rat in her mail at home, accompanied by a death threat, the reality of what it takes to reform a high school is brought into sharp relief.

The book is framed with a powerful foreword, preface and introduction which set the tone for the accounts by offering reasons for the need for redesign, the research supporting the need and the foundation upon which the need is built. The frame closes with a conclusion reiterating the foundation, editor bios, contributor bios and contact information. The peripheral information further

supports the credibility of the book and reinforces the topic of personalizing education.

When it comes to secondary school reform, frameworks and step-by-step processes may be effective; but nothing can compare to the voices of people who have lived through the experience, and particularly the voices of those who have pioneered a particular framework. The high school students of today require a different education if they are to succeed in the twenty-first century. *The Personalized High School: Making Learning Count for Adolescents* is an excellent place to begin meeting that need.

About the Reviewer

Diana Gutierrez is a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Brownsville, Curriculum and Instruction, Specialization in Educational Leadership. She is also an assistant principal currently serving at John F. Kennedy 6th grade campus in Mercedes ISD, Mercedes, Texas.

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