




## education review // reseñas educativas

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

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

reseñas educativas (Spanish)  
resenhas educativas (Portuguese)

These reviews have been accessed  times since July 1, 2006

### Brief reviews for July 2006

**Bennett-Armistead, V. Susan; Duke, Nell K. & Moses, Annie M. (2005). *Literacy and the Youngest Learner: Best Practices for Educators of Children from Birth to 5*. New York: Scholastic.**

*Literacy and the Youngest Learner* is the second book that V. Susan Bennett-Armistead and Nell Duke have written together. Their first book, *Reading and writing informational text in the primary grades: Research-based practices* (2003) addressed learning with informational texts and this book provides teacher-tested ideas for literacy learning from birth to age five. As with their first book, this excellent text is written in a conversational style that is accessible for teachers, parents, child-care providers, early childhood educators, administrators, and curriculum developers. There is also advice for groups on how to begin a professional book club with some hints on how to get started, how to create a diverse group with shared goals, how to make connections to practice and hear from everyone, and how to provide a meaningful time for reflecting on instructional practice with others in the group.

Topics in this text include having a literacy-rich environment and activities for young children, developing oral language through reading aloud and through building phonological awareness, creative ideas for dramatic play and writing, finding space beyond the classroom to include outdoor play and field trips, and finding literacy in unexpected places like mealtime and times of transition in the classroom. There are photographs and classroom examples to illustrate the best practices for many of the ideas in the book. Many of the ideas have step-by-step help to demonstrate how the examples can be used with children. For example, there are three variations of "The Name Game" to provide practice for moving sounds around in a fun way.

Resources for putting the ideas into practice are woven throughout the text. There are book lists for various types of reading such as great read aloud books, fabulous alphabet books, books for building phonological awareness, and great books to support early pretending. The book nook is "like having a library" and there are helpful guidelines on how to create a book nook and what to put in the space such as a cozy chair, blanket, pillows, and other items to invite young children to enjoy their time with a book. Displays, storage, nonbook materials to use in the book nook and flannel boards can also be a part of the book nook. Word games are another resource found in the text to help children learn phonological awareness through familiar songs and rhymes. Examples include Mother Goose nursery rhymes, songs like "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" and "Old Macdonald Had a Farm", and rhyming poems such as "Little Miss Muffet". Tongue twisters and stretching words to learn to slow down and emphasize the sounds in words are also noted resources.

Many writing instruction ideas are shown which includes a movable writing center and tips on how to develop, create and stock a writing center. Scaffolded process writing with the teacher or parent working with the child to promote drawing and writing is explained as moving through stages. Writing begins with scribbling from ages 2 to 4 and continues to grow through several stages of writing with invented spelling and finally into conventional spelling. There are examples and pictures of actual student writing for each stage of progress for children. Research based ideas on whether to correct or not correct student writing, and in particular student spelling, is discussed. The authors provide suggestions for how to help children learn to write their names and to encourage children to write from left to right.

*Literacy and the Youngest Learner* is a great book for all types of instructors who want to better learn how to teach young children to listen, speak, read, write, and think. The ideas in this book help educators support,

nurture, and promote literacy development. This text draws on existing research based strategies for language and literacy learning to engage and motivate young children as they are having fun. Goals for cultivating literacy in young children are stated as developed by the International Reading Association, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the National Research Council. This book will help everyone interested in literacy and helping our youngest learners to be successful in school.

## References

Duke, Nell K, & Bennett-Armistead, V. Susan (2003) *Reading & writing informational text in the primary grades*. New York: Scholastic Teaching Resources.

Pages: **240** Price: **\$21.99 U.S. / \$28.99 CAN** ISBN: **0-439-71447-8**

Reviewed by **Bette J. Shellhorn, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Eastern Michigan University**

### **Bracey, Gerald W. (2006). *Reading Educational Research: How to Avoid Getting Statistically Snookered*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

Gerald Bracey's regular columns in *Phi Delta Kappan* and occasional contributions in other publications have long played a valuable role in providing readable and insightful critiques of new educational research and the frequently excessive reliance on it by educational policy makers, as well as its misinterpretation and misuse by journalists and politicians. This book draws together a number of the examples of these problems and offers a list of thirty-two "Principles of Data Interpretation" to guide readers through the maze of statistical terms and strategies that are used in educational research.

Some of Bracey's "principles" seem simple enough common sense. Principle #30 – "Do not make important decisions about individuals or groups on the basis of a single test." – could easily gain the assent of most educators, even those who routinely violate it. Principle #3 – "Look for and beware of selectivity in the data." – is sound advice for the school administrator reviewing the latest "national study" on student achievement or the citizen browsing the morning newspaper. Similarly, in an age in which school jurisdictions across North America are investing large sums of taxpayer money in programs of "data-driven decision making", Bracey cautions readers in Principle #23 – "If a situation really is as alleged, ask 'So what?'"

The book should become a required text in courses aimed at introducing graduate students in education to research literacy, and it should be issued to those charged with making educational policy at the state and local levels. While familiarity with Bracey's critique of educational research may not prevent educators from generalizing wildly beyond their data, fending off questions with a shield emblazoned with the motto: "Studies show....," or jumping on board the newest curricular, pedagogical, or managerial bandwagon, it should at least plant seeds of doubt. The next time educators who have read Bracey's work seriously are confronted with the next touring motivational keynote speaker attempting to dazzle them with a blend of power-point and stand-up, their better angel might remind them of Principle #7 – "Beware of simple explanations for complex phenomena."

Similarly, although the book deals specifically with educational issues, the author's advice is useful to us in our roles as citizens and consumers of information in the popular media. Whether we are considering the question of global warming, the incidence of violence against women, or the ubiquitous medical/dietary story that always leads on an otherwise slow news day, we should be mindful of Principle #5 – "Be sure the rhetoric and the numbers match." Bracey provides an amusing example of what he terms "mutant statistics", tracing how a study that demonstrated that 46% of public school teachers in the City of Chicago sent their children to private schools (including, overwhelmingly, Catholic parochial schools) became transformed by columnist George Will into a claim that nearly half of public school teachers in the nation at large chose private schooling for their own children. Not long afterward, that claim appeared to become an unquestioned fact, particularly for those who sought to criticize, depending on their point of view, school teachers for their hypocrisy or the public school system for its weakness.

At the same time, not all quantitative educational researchers will agree with all of Bracey's principles. The claim in Principle #18 – "On a norm-referenced test, nationally, 50% of students are below average, by definition" – will be open to question, as will the claim in Principle #19 that "A norm-referenced standardized achievement test must test only material that all children have had an opportunity to learn." And while we cannot deny the caution of Principle #6 – "Beware of convenient claims that, whatever the calamity, public schools are to blame." – neither should we be hesitant to subject the public schools to fundamental criticism. For most of us, however, Bracey provides a helpful introduction to quantitative research and a valuable reminder of the limitations of that research.

Pages: 188 Price: \$22.00 ISBN: 0-325-00858-2

Reviewed by Robert Nicholas Bérard, Director of Teacher Education, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia

---

**Cooper, J. David; Chard, David & Kiger, Nancy D. (2006). *The Struggling Reader: Interventions That Work*. New York: Scholastic.**

J. David Cooper, David Chard, and Nancy D. Kiger, in *The Struggling Reader: Interventions That Work*, offer educators an approach to reading instruction that focuses on prevention and intervention rather than advocating remediation. In the wake of No Child Left Behind and Reading First legislation, there is an expectation that classroom teachers are to identify potential reading problems before they become lifelong issues. The authors have offered a balance of proven and purposeful information from theory and practice to meet the needs for instruction and diagnostic assessment for children learning to read.

As stated in the Introduction, the three authors together have more than 100 years of experience teaching struggling readers using procedures that the authors have developed and tested as educational researchers. They have taught in all 50 states and in more than eight countries. Students in preschool, elementary school, middle school, Title 1, adult basic education, exceptional education, junior high school, high school, undergraduates, and graduate students have all been taught using the methods and approaches in this book. The authors have taught in rural, suburban, and urban settings that represent communities of affluence, poverty, and developing countries. In addition, the authors have worked with students whose first language is not English, whose lives are lived in fear of harm, and whose family members cannot or do not read and write, so they are well qualified to focus on how to work with struggling readers in any situation.

The book offers A Prevention-Intervention Framework for students who are struggling readers or who show signs of becoming struggling readers. This Framework provides an organized way to incorporate all the assessment tools and strategies for instruction to be used for struggling readers. There are five components to the Core Instruction part of the Framework that are to be used for planning, instruction, and intervention:

1. Assess and Diagnose
2. Teach/Reteach
3. Practice
4. Reassess
5. and Apply

Other topics the book covers include areas in which struggling readers will most likely need specific instruction, such as oral language, phonemic awareness, word recognition, meaning vocabulary, reading fluency, comprehension, and writing as it pertains to struggling readers. Each topic begins with a case study of teachers and students; a definition for the topic; and examples and activities to support struggling readers as they learn the topic. These topics are also considered through the lens of the five part Framework. For example, the oral language presentation uses each of the five elements. Levels of ability are noted for primary and intermediate assessment. It also provides student work samples and example checklists, diagrams, and template forms used in the classroom.

The authors state that their purpose is to help educators reach students who struggle with reading and writing, students who do not thrive in a “regular” reading program that helps most other learners, students who are in danger of getting farther and farther behind other students as time goes on, students who can and do fall through the cracks of education each day, students who need to learn more than adequate yearly progress can offer just to catch up or for those students who are discouraged and just give up on learning. All of these goals are met in *The Struggling Reader: Interventions That Work* in clear and accessible language that all educators can understand and learn from. Beginning teachers as well as seasoned administrators may find this book to be informative and practical. This resource offers the essential knowledge of research-based instructional practices for intervention and prevention of reading difficulties. Their classroom tested framework and the examples presented that support the framework offer planning tools, assessments, and record-keeping templates that are very helpful in preventing reading difficulties and working with those students who are already struggling readers.

One final thought from the book is to “Keep Yourself Current” about best practices for teaching reading. The authors encourage educators to join professional organizations; to read professional journals, books, and periodicals; to attend workshops and classes; and find information on the Internet as well as through collaboration with colleagues. *The Struggling Reader: Interventions That Work* provides the current best of theory and practice for educators of all levels and with an organized and clear presentation of ideas to help

teachers reach struggling readers in the classroom.

## References

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: An Act To close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind. Public Law 107-110. Retrieved April 15, 2006 from [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/useftpl.cgi?IPaddress=162.140.64.21&filename=publ110.107&directory=/diskc/wais/data/107\\_cong\\_public\\_laws](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/useftpl.cgi?IPaddress=162.140.64.21&filename=publ110.107&directory=/diskc/wais/data/107_cong_public_laws).

United States. Department of Education (2004). *Reading First Program*. Retrieved April 15, 2006 from <http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html>

Pages: **208** Price: **\$23.99** ISBN: **0-439-61659-X**

Reviewed by **Bette J. Shellhorn, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Eastern Michigan University**

**Dodge, Judith (2005). *Differentiation in Action: A Complete Resource with Research- Supported Strategies to Help You Plan and Organize Differentiated Instruction and Achieve Success with All Learners, Grades 4-12*. New York: Scholastic.**

Reaching all learners, from the advanced to the struggling, while trying to meet ever tougher instructional standards, is a difficult task in today's highly heterogeneous and overcrowded schools. *Differentiation in Action* by Judith Dodge adds to a growing body of literature addressing this important issue. Written from the perspective of applying discoveries in brain research to address learner differences, *Differentiation in Action* is first and foremost a how-to manual for any teacher working in grades 4 and up. As manuals go, this is a particularly well-constructed one, with its many useful activity pages, example lesson plans, and student work samples. A particularly nice feature of the book is its large collection of insightful margin annotations.

### **Pitching differentiation to teachers with different interest and experience levels**

A consultant to school districts, Dodge has a keen sense of what will prove useful to teachers with different interests and levels of experience. Those new to differentiation will find concrete descriptions of all of the basic tools of differentiated teaching, including choice boards, contracts, evaluation rubrics, learning logs, and tiered lessons. In the area of classroom management — a key consideration where novice teachers are concerned — Chapter 6, "Maximizing Student Learning with Flexible Grouping" stands out for its comprehensive presentation of grouping strategies. Additional classroom management tips appear on almost every page of the book, most often within the idea boxes and teacher-reflection boxes that populate the margins

Teachers already versed in differentiation will also find plenty of stimulating material. "Show Me the Research" and "Putting Research into Practice," two recurring sections of the book, discuss the research behind the applications contained in each chapter, and challenge teachers to engage in action research themselves. Represented in these discussions are some of the most influential ideas in education, including Bloom's Taxonomies, Learning Styles, Multiple Intelligences, and Vygotskian theories. Suggestion boxes with references to additional readings and teaching resources will also prove particularly interesting to more experienced readers.

Regardless of their level of experience, all practitioners will benefit from the professional development activities presented in the "Study Guide." To promote collegial circle discussions, Dodge provides a framework for groups of teachers to reflect on their classroom practices as they work through the book. This is a novel and valuable contribution of the book.

### **The missing links: Workload and technology**

While *Differentiation in Action* constitutes an excellent resource on differentiation, it would have benefited from a discussion of two closely connected topics: workload and technology. When it comes to differentiated instruction, issues of workload loom large in the minds of teachers. Questions like these come to mind:

- "Where will I find the time and energy to create more activities?"
- "With on-going assessment being a key component of differentiated teaching, does this mean I have to be writing and grading tests all of the time?"
- "How will I keep track of what each student is doing?"

Technology provides partial answers to these questions and offers unprecedented opportunities for addressing learner differences in today's overcrowded classrooms. For example, existing computer applications make it possible to create large databanks of differentiated activities and assessments for teachers to contribute to, and draw from. As for grading and tracking of student progress, both can be facilitated through the use of pedagogical software. In disciplines such as language arts, foreign languages, and math, computer mediated instruction also allows students to practice the more mechanical skills on their own, thereby freeing teachers to focus their efforts on other aspects of instruction. Likewise, virtual centers and stations have the potential to improve learning, through increased flexibility and opportunities for engaging students in meaningful work both in and out of the classroom.

To be fair, among books on differentiation, this book is not alone in its failure to adequately address matters of technology and workload. Regrettably, the general lack of attention to these issues represents a missed opportunity, and has so far limited the growth and development of the field.

## Conclusion

Notwithstanding this single blind spot, *Differentiation in Action* is a valuable addition to the literature on differentiated instruction, and can be expected to benefit any teacher, whether new or experienced.

Pages: **160** Price: **\$19.99** ISBN: **0439650917**

**Reviewed by Maria Carreira, professor of Spanish linguistics at California State University, Long Beach. Her publications focus on Spanish in the United States, Spanish as a world language, and foreign language pedagogy. She is the co-author of a beginning Spanish textbook (Nexos, Houghton Mifflin, 2005) and of a forthcoming textbook for teaching Spanish to bilingual Latinos (S' se puede, Houghton Mifflin). Dr. Carreira is currently working on adapting the practices of differentiated instruction to foreign language instruction at the secondary and post secondary levels.**

## **Gaskins, Irene West (2005). *Success With Struggling Readers: The Benchmark School Approach*. New York: Guilford.**

The founder of the Benchmark school in suburban Philadelphia, Dr. Gaskins discusses her search for the answer to why some students learn to read while others don't and what works for teaching struggling readers. Founded in 1970, The Benchmark School has been the site for action research by both Gaskins and her faculty. Students who attend Benchmark are below grade level in reading, have average to above-average intelligence and cannot attribute their reading delay to emotional or neurological problems. Many of the students attending Benchmark had been given up on at schools where teachers taught a "one-size-fits-all" approach. A single approach does not work for all students.

Organized into a lower school, which serves students in grades 1-6, and a middle school for grades 7 and 8, Benchmark provides the small, caring environment necessary to turn struggling readers into successful students. Grounded on the premise that no two students learn the same, the curriculum and strategies used are research-based and continually evolve through intensive professional development. Learning is not something done to the students—it is something done by the students. Reading programs tend to focus on deficits, but Benchmark focuses its curriculum on teaching the skills needed and providing strategies to help students learn those skills.

Throughout her book, Gaskins shares what she has learned during her forty-five years of experience in working with struggling readers. She discusses the staff's preparation and rationale for teaching specific strategies across the curriculum along with personal examples that illustrate the strategies used. The book is divided into three sections, as follows:

### **Part I-Struggling Readers**

There is almost never just one reason why a child is struggling in reading. Some students struggle to learn to read because there is a mismatch between how they learn and how they are taught.

(p. 242) For teachers at Benchmark, professional development is a way of life. Their focus is always the same—"What do research and theory have to say about how children learn and how can we apply our findings to helping our struggling readers learn to read?" (p. 16) Out of their collaborative research, the Interactive Learning Model (ILM) was developed. This model serves as the foundation for making decisions about student needs. The ILM allows teachers to consider:

- Which person variables support or impede learning?

- Which situation variables maximize learning?
- For which task and text variables should the student be made aware and taught strategies? (p. 19)

A variety of roadblocks interrupt struggling readers. Instruction at Benchmark is adapted to the characteristics of the reader, guides students to be aware of these characteristics and eventually, helps students take charge of the characteristics that interfere with their success. Three cognitive styles that tend to be problematic for students addressed by Benchmark are: impulsivity, inflexibility and nonpersistence. Person variables present in good readers that need to be learned by struggling readers are attentiveness, active involvement, adaptability, reflectivity and persistence (p. 45). Gaskins provides several charts and illustrations along with specific examples from the classroom to support her model. Remaining chapters in Part I discuss exploring strengths and challenges as personal variables for students.

## **Part II-Context and Theories of Learning**

In an age of standardized state tests, the focus in education is getting students to pass the exam. The focus at Benchmark is to “prepare students for a fulfilling adulthood as life-long learners, thinkers and problem solvers (p. 67).” Gaskins reminds us that teachers need to be tuned into their students now more than ever.

Without the skill to create an effective learning environment for all students, teachers cannot help students be successful. Teachers, Gaskin purports, need to teach students to ask questions when they are confused or don’t know something. Only by building caring, collaborative classrooms and implementing structured experiences will students begin to trust their ability to learn.

Since students have a lack of knowledge about how learning works, it is imperative for teachers to help them develop this understanding. When students are metacognitive about their learning, they are able to monitor and determine what works best for them to take control of their own learning. Because thinking and learning are active processes, it is critical for teachers to orchestrate lessons that allow students to use a metacognitive approach to their learning and thinking. Struggling readers tend to be impulsive and do not reflect on process for how to learn. The premise at Benchmark is that students must be able to construct meaning in what they are doing.

Gaskin focuses on six principles supported by the faculty at Benchmark. These learning principles include: learning is an interactive process; learning is more likely to occur if instruction is explicit; learning is a social act; learning is developmental and therefore occurs at different rates and in different ways; learning is more likely to occur if the learning situation meets the students’ motivational needs; and learning is enhanced by immediate feedback and accountability. When students are taught the strategies to think and reason and to be self-reflective they are ready to learn.

## **Part III-Classroom Implementation**

“Children who struggle to read often exhibit difficulties in phonemic awareness, decoding, and fluency” (Torgesen & Burgess, 1998). Gaskins’ work at Benchmark tells us that when students are having difficulty with fluency their ability to comprehend is also compromised (p. 155). By teaching with an approach that emphasizes concepts, essential understandings, and knowledge of structures rather than traditional detail-oriented approaches, teachers at Benchmark provide opportunities for students to create patterns. In their previous experience, students have completed worksheets and workbooks—none of these isolated activities works for struggling readers. Dr. Gaskin reminds us that struggling readers “need multiple and varied opportunities to apply and practice what they are learning. Part III provides a variety of activities and strategies for developing phonemic awareness, decoding and fluency.

Benchmark implements a gradual progression of strategy instruction from first grade through eighth grade. By providing the foundation in first grade, each level expands on the previous strategies. Self-regulation is practiced at each level to help develop the volition and metacognitive skills needed for learning, thinking and problem-solving.

Gaskins ends her book with five major insights she has gained during the last forty-five years: teachers—not materials—determine success in learning to read; children fall behind in reading for a variety of reasons; there is more to teaching struggling readers than teaching reading; there are no quick fixes; and becoming a teacher is a life-long process.

What works? The answer is simple—a caring teacher, who is grounded in current research, manages the classroom and its environment, teaches students explicitly how to accomplish their tasks and understands that no two students learn exactly the same. Although this book will be of interest to school leaders, literacy teachers will want to read it to improve their practice. This comprehensive book offers charts, reproducible figures and activities for immediate implementation across the curriculum. Teachers at Benchmark tell the

students what they are going to learn, why it is important, when they can expect to use it, and how to do it. They model, scaffold instruction and provide opportunities for meaningful practice. Benchmark students are successful because they are taught how to be motivated to learn and are provided the strategies to be successful—they have been let in on the secret of learning.

## References

Torgesen, J.K., & Burgess, S.R. (1998). Consistency of reading-related phonological processes throughout early childhood: Evidence from longitudinal-correlational and instructional studies. In J. Metsala & L. Ehri (Eds.) *Word recognition in beginning literacy*

Pages: **246** Price: **\$30.00(paperback); \$55.00(hardcover)** ISBN: **1-59385-169-3(paperback); 1-59385-170-7(hardcover)**

Reviewed by Michelle Savage, San Marcos CISD, San Marcos, Texas.

**Miller, Sherman N. (2005) *Teaching College Algebra: Reversing the Effects of Social Promotion*. Latham, MD: Rowman Education.**

This is a practical book presenting teaching ideas to enhance student success in introductory college algebra courses, in particular as a prerequisite to the core mathematics course for business majors. If you teach that course, it is well worth the short read of this well written, thoughtful book.

### Teaching Styles in College Algebra

Benefits may be generated right off the bat. For example, after outlining the literature on the key issues in this area, the author focuses on the importance of maintaining a teaching style which best matches unprepared students

A wide variety of teaching styles works pretty well in college algebra, but not all are optimal for developing unprepared students. And the style that may work well for a student body of engineers and pre-meds who are taking calculus in their frosh year might not be best for college algebra for business students. To enhance the opportunities for success with students who come to the University from high schools lacking college-level work ethics, the author suggests that faculty be very clear about expectations and behavior in the class. When dealing with this group, the author suggests that it is very important for the instructor to maintain a structured, focused and controlled environment.

The author also urges a linear progression of topics, starting with the most basic topics – such as fractions – reinforced with problems and calculations. This is more to get students used to success and understanding than to teach these subjects for the first time.

### Testing Teaching Premises

After exploring the idea of teaching style the author presents two chapters devoted to the teaching premises for students who are channeled into college algebra courses. Much of the advice and discussion here addresses dealing with students from schools infested with a gang mentality. For someone encountering this, the advice is specific, concise, cogent and illustrated with anecdotes and examples. Topical coverage and its sequencing are also discussed. Most importantly, the author focuses on what works well, rather than complaining about what does not.

### Preparing Non-Traditional Students for College Math

This is followed by a chapter devoted to a subject everyone talks about in generalities. Here, the author does a superb job of providing guidance and insight on how to teach the gamut of non-traditional students. Perhaps this is best illustrated by the commentary relating to teaching math in prisons. Again, the beauty of this book is the specificity of the advice given, well illustrated with tables and examples which can be plucked out of the book and plopped down immediately in the classroom.

### A New Paradigm for Pre-Calculus

The bulk of the book is invested in Chapter 5, entitled “First Semester Pre-calculus Under a New Paradigm.” The strengths outlined above are apparent from the very beginning of this chapter. The author points out that the goals of this kind of class should be very different from other college math classes. For example, the key

problems in teaching first semester pre-calculus are far more basic than teaching the math. Instead, students must first learn how to read a math book, and how to think mathematically rather than arithmetically.

Crucial, too, is the emphasis on comprehension of concepts, rather than merely exposure. Students need to internalize how to use pre-calculus to analyze fact patterns and come up with good business solutions. This means students writing on the board. This means practice. Here the author provides a series of tables, charts, graphs, examples, and other visuals which can be readily used in the classroom, along with commentary on how to use them, starting with the very basic – times tables – and moving through number lines and inequalities to polynomials, reducing rational expressions, and simply graphing. Much of this comes so naturally to math-gifted individuals – such as college math professors – that it is very hard to teach. These examples help the well-abled deliver to the less-capable.

### Testing

Like the rest of the book the discussion of testing is grounded in the literature, but goes beyond it by articulating techniques that work. It is best praised by pointing out what it is not: it is not more gibberish about assessment. Despite the ink devoted by administrators to the subject, assessment is not new and, indeed, is something every college professor does constantly.

Here, the focus is where it should be: how can student testing be used best as a learning tool? There are discussions on the pros and cons of a variety of details, such as testing students on a set of questions they can choose from, limiting the number of midterm exams, and removing most graded assignments from the early part of the course. The advantage of some of these is obvious. Take the last: doesn't it make sense not to give tests, which largely determine a course grade, early in a course with a lot of students who are unprepared? Early midterms allow students to give up before they can catch up. This may be obvious, but it is all too rare in college algebra. Currently, many find it is so much easier to give lots of multiple-choice exams to flunk out the unprepared, which in turn makes it so much easier to teach those who are left.

### Conclusion

Although thoroughly grounded in the literature, this is an eminently practical, well-written book that is worth the read. The right things need to be taught in college algebra: the author discusses what makes things right to discuss, pointing out that for unprepared student the topics should reach far back, as they all too often do not. Problem solving at the board, rather than memorization and regurgitation on a number of multiple-choice midterms, is in order. The important things are best learned through hard work, and by generating momentum in succeeding in using the materials.

These things are not accomplished on the cheap, nor are they the skills and knowledge which college math professors should focus on in traditional frosh calculus classes and other classes for the math-capable. But they are the very things necessary for the less math-abled, just the kind of students who populate college algebra courses. They need a different kind of teaching and faculty teaching them need a different kind of teaching style to optimize student success. This book does an excellent job of explaining how to accomplish this.

Pages: **185** Price: **\$29.95** ISBN: **1-57886-242-6**

**Reviewed by John E. Karayan, JD PhD, Professor of Business at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. His public service includes charities and governmental advisory boards; he keeps current in his field as an expert witness on accounting issues in complex business litigation. Welcome Page: <http://www.csupomona.edu/~jekarayan>.**

---

**Nathan, Rebekah (2005). *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.**

Rebekah Nathan, a professor at a large public institution, had been teaching for almost two decades. She was feeling increasingly disconnected from her students and was searching for a way to better understand the student culture. As an anthropologist she was trained to be observant, and it was frustrating to her that she did not feel like she was connecting with her students.

As a result she began to take a few classes outside her field and the idea for her ethnography study, *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student* began to take shape. By taking on the role of a college student, she had access to a world that was not available to her as a professor. She decided to apply as a first year student and really become immersed in the world outside the classroom; live in a residence hall, participate in activities and take a full load of classes. What better way is there to understand



student culture?

Research similar to this has been conducted, one example being Michael Moffatt's book *Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture* published in 1989. What distinguishes Nathan's work is that she relinquished her official role with her university, created the pseudonym Rebekah Nathan, and applied as a first year student, therefore conducting her research from the perspective of a student. She went through the entire orientation process, lived in the residence hall, and enrolling in a full load of classes.

This study results in an interesting and insightful look into the lives of students. Nathan is trained as an anthropologist and conducts her research in the same way that she visited and studied villages overseas. She provides a visual description of residence life complete with insight into the importance of door decoration, flyers, jokes, photos and collages (p. 21). She explains how these rituals help to establish the student culture. Students use door displays as a way to communicate their interests, popularity, and the subcultures that they identify with.

Another important observation by the researcher was that student schedules and social circles are in flux. This is primarily a result of the many choices that students can make and when students exercise those choices they create a great deal of change. She states,

The University becomes, for individual students, an optional set of activities and a fluid set of people whose paths are ever shifting. Seen from the level of the institution, "community" is a lofty ideal but with few common activities, rituals, or even symbols to bind together its diverse inhabitants. (p.40)

According to Nathan, achieving a balance between providing students with choices and creating a supportive community presents administrators and faculty with tremendous challenges.

Creating such a community is an important issue currently in higher education. Much of the programming is centered on connecting the student to the university community to insure retention rates. But as Nathan discovers students who value their independence are resistant to planned or required efforts at creating community. One example she discusses is a required book club experience. And although there are pressures to create such a community, the researcher found that many of these efforts although well meaning and thoughtful do often fail. She writes, "The same things that make us feel connected and protected are the things that make us feel obligated and trapped as individuals" (p. 48). This paradox is at the heart of the challenges of programming for community at the university.

The reality of community really centers on what researchers describe as "ego-centered networks" (p. 55). Students select their associates and then schedule around those selected others. There are really few open invitations. This observation provides understanding and insight regarding failed diversity efforts at universities. Students create insular networks, which are not as diverse as proponents would like. An example of this is offered by the researcher through her observations of the manner that students selected seating in the dining hall. She found that as students formed networks of dining partners "Although the networks of Caucasian students included more whites, and those of people of color more minorities, the total networks of minority students were primarily mixed" (p. 63). Nathan's research reminds us that to build strong communities on our college campuses, administrators, faculty and staff must remain committed to addressing issues of diversity.

What follows the researcher's observations on community and diversity is an interesting discussion of friendship especially from the viewpoint of international students. The theme of individualism runs strongly through an American definition of friendship. The international students describe the American definition of friendship as not being as deep or committed as their own. This was important in light of how networks were negotiated, favors were conducted and actions were reciprocated. The American students did not always follow through on promises of friendship. Relationships were often as fluid as the selection of a social group or ego group. If the student dropped out of an activity often times the ties to those people also were severed. The researcher's observations of the international student experience were particularly informative and could be used to improve services to international students.

The most startling piece of discussion as well as the most difficult to process especially for faculty is that academic life does not appear to be very important to students. Classes and intellectual activity is just a minor part of a student's day. "Non-class-related learning was reported as high as 90 percent for some, and few students ranked class activities as constituting more than 50 percent of what they learned in college" (p. 101). Most students stated that they learned the most from their social activities. The research revealed that classes were something to be managed. One popular "management" technique especially for first year and second year students included cheating, perhaps not outright plagiarism, but sharing answers, working together on assignments and getting help from former students (p. 124). This was probably one of the most

insightful sections of the research. Nathan discusses how cheating is viewed as part of the “game” and she reveals that students compare cheating to stealing bases in baseball. Her research provides a look into how students view cheating, why they feel justified in doing it, as well as the fact that incidents of cheating tend to decline as students learn to manage the workload of college in their junior and senior years. The act of cheating appears to be more of a management technique than a moral dilemma.

Nathan closes the book by providing the reader with her own lessons learned. It was a transformative experience for her especially when she tells the story of resuming her role as a professor the next year. Having sat in the giant classroom and become one of those in a sea of faces, she felt more empathy for those students who were juggling more than just her class material. Interestingly the experience also altered her teaching style, as well as several of her delivery methods. It is certainly a challenge to bridge the gap between faculty member and student. This book is one way to begin.

The book also includes an interesting discussion on ethnography and the ethical dilemmas faced by the researcher. This discussion is particularly helpful to those who are interested in ethics and ethnography. It is important to note that although the author did take steps to maintain the privacy of her students and school, her real identity and the school where she did her research was recently revealed.

This book is an excellent resource for individuals interested in college students, college culture, residential life, international students, ethics and ethnography.

## References

Moffatt, M. (1989). *Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Pages: **168** Price: **\$24.00** ISBN: **0-8014-4397-0**

Reviewed by Nancy Donovan, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida

---

## Ryan, James (2005). *Inclusive Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Since the 1990's there has been a growing body of literature on democratic, empowering or participatory approaches in educational evaluation and research. As Visser (2003) states, there is a “democratization movement driven by philosophically charged debates within the social sciences, and characterized by attempts to make research and evaluation more inclusive, transparent, and democratic.”

In the field of educational administration, the democratization movement is also reflected in the reform and leadership literature. As Heck & Hallinguer (1999), state this orientation is associated with a critical or emancipatory approach for the study of school organizations and leadership that entails a critique of existing social relations and is strongly concerned with the impact of culture, gender, ethnicity, and democracy on leadership in the schools. It is within this framework that James Ryan has written his book on *Inclusive Leadership*.

Ryan's book is divided into four chapters. In chapter one, the author makes a case for inclusive leadership. He sees leadership as inclusive in two ways: by involving many individuals and groups and their values and perspectives in decision-making and policy making, as well as by promoting inclusive practices in the school. In order to illustrate this, Ryan provides the example of Beacon Elementary School, a school with a diverse student and faculty population that has been successful including all members of its community in leadership processes. In other sections of the chapter, Ryan examines the obstacles to inclusion, particularly when the educational system ignores and devalues student knowledge and culture, such as in current testing schemes and teacher-proof-curriculum practices that limit teacher experience and community input. He endorses inclusive leadership as a collective rather than individual process that allows the inclusion, participation and representation of all members in the school community.

In chapter two, Ryan focuses on the problem of exclusion. He analyzes how certain groups can be excluded in the schools and the wider community and how this affects the individuals and the institutions. Ryan indicates that schools exclude students by both including curriculum content that is not related to their cultural capital and by not involving them as part of the learning processes, in the selection of curriculum content or as part of the authority structures. As a consequence, the poor, ethnic and cultural minorities, as well as groups with a different sexual orientation are not only excluded in the curriculum, but also from the pedagogy and leadership activities of the school (p. 32). Although, the author recognizes that there have been improvements regarding exclusion, he stresses that discrimination and exclusion are still reflected in high

student dropout rates, lower salaries and fewer leadership opportunities for excluded groups.

Ryan also analyzes another kind of exclusion, exclusion from leadership theories that support practice in the school, such as the Managerial/Technical, Humanistic and Transformational approaches to leadership. The author points out that exclusion takes place not only by excluding group culture and values from leadership practices, but also by implementing practices based on leadership approaches that endorse values against inclusion. The main problem that Ryan's sees with the emphasis on current leadership approaches is that these positions view leadership as an individual enterprise, not as a collective endeavor. By doing this, the leadership promoted by traditional approaches can be an obstacle for equity and inclusion in the schools.

Chapter three, examines the main findings and implications of the research on teacher and student leadership, shared governance, site-based management, community involvement, participative and emancipatory leadership as the basis for inclusive leadership. In contrast with other leadership approaches that emphasize the top-down, bureaucratic and managerial aspects of leadership, and emphasize corporate values, inclusive leadership promotes a collaborative, reciprocal and horizontal relationship, with emphasis on tolerance, patience, openness to giving and receiving, altruism and other educational values.

In addition, while traditional approaches to leadership use the metaphor of the leader as a hero—the person in whom the power resides, someone who values homogeneity—inclusive leadership relies in the metaphor of a group of modest men and women who are willing to make mistakes and listen thoughtfully and attentively. According to Ryan, leadership resides in equitable, caring and fluid relationships among individuals. Moreover, while traditional leadership approaches focus on products and emphasize management, and a leader who spend time putting out fires and maintaining the status quo rather than challenging the system, inclusive leadership focuses on both process and products, emphasizes the educational side of leadership and sees leaders spending time in dialogue and critique of the existing patterns of privilege in the schools. Auditing for inclusive leadership is educational, moral and democratic. It is not focused on standardized testing like traditional leadership approaches. To illustrate how the principles from this body of literature can be put into practice in the schools, Ryan presents real life examples of successful inclusive leadership.

In chapter four, Ryan recognizes that moving away from traditional approaches of leadership to inclusive leadership is not an easy task for school administrators. However, he believes that this is possible by using a framework for practicing and promoting inclusive leadership in the schools. This framework involves (a) thinking about leadership, (b) including participants, (c) advocating for inclusion, (d) educating participants, (e) developing critical consciousness, (f) promoting dialogue, (g) emphasizing student learning and classroom practice; (h) adopting decision-making and policymaking practices; and (i) incorporating whole school approaches. Along the chapter, Ryan presents different examples to illustrate how this approach can work effectively in school communities.

Written in an accessible and concise way, Ryan's book draws from educational research and practice to analyze and illustrate how school leaders can use inclusive leadership for understanding and improving the learning opportunities for all children in their school communities. Ryan accomplishes what many other writers and scholars promoting dialogical, democratic or empowerment theories have not always been able to do, in a smart manner he is able to link theory to practice and illustrate how and why it is essential to change the way we look at schools and leadership. The way in which he uses the examples is remarkable and makes the reader reflect on the implications and consequences of current practice, as well as on the need of moving away from individualistic to community approaches of leadership.

## References

Heck, R. H. & Hallinger, P. (1999). Next generation methods for the study of leadership and school improvement. In J. Murphy & K. Seashore (Eds.), *Handbook of research on educational administration: A project of the American Educational Research Association*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Visser, R. (2003). *Trends in program evaluation: The emergence of pragmatism*. Texas Center for Adult Literacy & Learning. Available online: <http://www-tcall.tamu.edu/orp/orp5.htm>

Pages: **186** Price: **\$22.00** ISBN: **0-7879-6508-1**

Reviewed by Edith J. Cisneros-Cohernour, Associate Professor, Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán. Her areas of research interest are evaluation, and professional and organizational development.

---

**Tatum, Alfred (2005) *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males: Closing the Achievement Gap*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.**

Tatum's intentions are to help teachers of black adolescent males identify strategies and skills that lead to effective literacy instruction. He begins with a description of a personal catastrophic incident that caused him, initially, to question the efficacy of efforts to empower black males. This incident subsequently provided the impetus for renewed fervor in helping expand educational opportunities for black males, which he proposes is possible only when they possess requisite literacy skills. While acknowledging the text's inability to fully address the issue of literacy among black males, Tatum does propose ways in which schools can respond to these students' needs and improve their chances of academic success.

Tatum describes a myriad of challenges faced by black adolescent males, many of whom, when they realize how they live in contrast to how the rest of society lives, perceive society's indifference to their existence. This leads to such responses as "cynicism, self-loathing, despair, a retarded sense of one's destiny, and frustration" (p. 8). Schooling, which many of these youth see as irrelevant and superficial, contributes to such reactions. Also, the stereotype of black males as delinquent can lead to feelings of guilt, anger, and hostility. All of these, according to Tatum, along with the disconnect between how black boys live and what/how they are required to read in school, contribute to their limited reading ability. He suggests that educators are generally unaware of the negative themes depicted in required reading, themes that often do not allow black boys to experience a feeling control or challenge, to set goals or give feedback, or to focus on the immediate in their lives. This leads them to internalize perceptions that their teachers see them as incapable of doing intellectual work and do not care about the important role of literacy in their lives. Tatum contends that literacy instruction, if it is to be effective, must be seen by black males as valuable.

Tatum emphasizes the relevance of texts to help black males see promise. He suggests that teachers examine the relevance of texts they select to facilitate the process in which black male students may extract meaning from texts and connect the school environment to their lives and future. He recounts how the turmoil in his own personal life had had a positive effect on his literacy development by providing solitude and an awareness of his differences, provoking anger, and leading to a discovery of books about his own black self that ultimately gave him strength. He acknowledges readily, however, that this is not always applicable in the lives of other young black males who live in turmoil. Teachers must help black adolescent males see the relevance and empowering impact of literacy to their current lives and to their future.

Some of the disparity in achievement between black and white students is explained by the lack of clarity concerning what goals are to be accomplished and how, confusion about the role of literacy instruction for black adolescent males, and the tendency on the part of educators and policymakers to focus primarily on instructional strategy without giving attention to curriculum orientation and pedagogical strategies. Tatum criticizes the lack of effectiveness of institutional responses, such as to build more prisons, and likens them to those inadvertently created by schools and educators, what he calls "micro-aggression, psychometric warfare," misguided educational placements, barriers to learning (inadequate teachers and resources, low teacher expectations, and ineffective administrators), and expulsions and suspensions. Effective literacy instruction for black males must respond to multiple literacies – academic, cultural, emotional, and social.

Tatum posits that a definition of masculinity is also required, since black males' misguided sense of masculinity (being "cool") often has negative consequences. He proposes a three-strand framework for advancing black adolescents' literary that helps promote academic excellence, self-esteem, and high aspirations: theoretical, instructional, and professional-development.

The theoretical strand focuses on quality instruction for **all** students; texts that help students examine questions about the meaning of their lives and how their lives are impacted by race, economics, gender, and so on; authentic experiences that help empower black males and enable them to transcend their current experiences; and the integration of culture as an important source of the child's education. He notes that in order for these to be effective, they must be subsumed under the important quality of "teacher care." A checklist is provided by which teachers may assess whether they are culturally responsive teachers, and Tatum offers a wide array of cognitive demanding texts that can help black students apply the literacy skills and strategies taught. Tatum makes an important observation, one that is frequently ignored — that there are cultural differences between black males living in turmoil and those who do not, but he acknowledges the historical connection of all black males in America.

The instructional strand includes strategy and skill development: identifying appropriate curriculum materials, evaluating students' literacy behaviors, examining curriculum roles and orientations, using research-based instructional strategies (building vocabulary, fluency instruction, comprehension, and writing), and engaging students in reading as a process that requires action by the reader. Black males must be able to understand why they should read selected texts, to construct questions as they read, to become aware of their own identity, and to connect reading to the turmoil they experience. Also, teachers must respect students as competent readers and individuals, and they must have the proper teacher disposition. Assessment practices must be comprehensive (cognitive, pedagogical, psychological, and sometimes physiological), must be used

to improve teacher practices and broaden students' chances and choices, and should provide specific strategies that parents may use to help improve their children's reading. Tatum provides several examples of his own successful strategies and offers four progressive instructional activities that challenge students to read at a higher level, not their reading level but their grade level.

The professional-development strand derives from an understanding of the theoretical and instructional strands. It focuses on professional development and on conducting teacher inquiries. Tatum notes that one exceptional teacher alone is insufficient to effect schoolwide change and that a community of teachers focused on shared goals, with administrative support, ensures that a student's success is not dependent on who he is lucky enough to get as his teacher. Teachers must understand the student's culture and how the classroom environment affects learning, must plan instruction relevant to the student's culture, and must be able to negotiate the cultural disconnect between home and school. Effective professional-development communities must be continuous, purposeful, collaborative, explicit, and grounded in teachers' own work and research on best practices

In order for literacy instruction to be relevant for black males, Tatum says it should help them examine questions about the meaning of their lives and how their lives are impacted by race, economics, gender, etc. He stresses that black males must see that literacy holds power and they must also see empowered black males engaging in authentic experiences that help them overcome obstacles, acknowledge their blackness, and formulate realistic goals.

Tatum handles well the argument about whether schooling should be functional or empowering and likens it to the Washington-DuBois debate. He is effective in describing what schools and policymakers must do, including examining their own roles and goals to create curriculum and school experiences that are relevant for all children.

This book provides an effective guide for teachers and schools to improve literacy instruction for black males. The book calls upon educators to conduct self-assessments, to evaluate the efficacy of their instructional skills and strategies, to clarify instructional goals, and to engage in purposeful and continuous professional development so as to create effective learning communities. The book is a poignant portrayal of societal and school factors that result in struggling black adolescent male readers but also provides personal examples and guidelines that can and should be replicated.

Pages: **165** Price: **\$17.50** ISBN: **1 57110393 7**

**Reviewed by Dr. Francine Giles Madrey, professor and Interim Associate Dean of the School of Education and Human Performance at Winston-Salem State University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Her expertise and research interests are in the areas of diversity and student development.**



~ ER home | *Reseñas Educativas* | *Resenhas Educativas* ~

~ overview | reviews | editors | submit | guidelines | announcements | search ~