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### Brief reviews for December 2006

**Au, Kathryn Hu-Pei (2006). *Multicultural Issues and Literacy Achievement*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.**

**Pages: 232 Price: \$24.95 ISBN: 0-8058-4401-5**

*Multicultural Issues and Literacy Achievement* is a sequel to *Literacy Instruction in Multicultural Settings* (1993) and is a must-read book for teachers who have students of diverse backgrounds in their classrooms and for undergraduate and graduate students who are currently studying in teacher education programs. Many such teachers and students tend to de-emphasize teaching high-level thinking skills and instead emphasize teaching low-level literacy skills. Au, however, postulates that teachers should maintain high expectations of students from diverse backgrounds because the literacy achievement gap between those students and mainstream students stems from teachers' negative innate social beliefs and attitudes. Maintaining high expectations toward such students, understanding their learning styles and cultures, and replacing teachers' negative perspectives toward them with positive ones should be an essential goal for educators. Such methods will allow diverse students to diminish their literacy achievement gap and succeed in mainstream academic settings.

One of the strengths of this book is that Au examines the literacy achievement gap experienced by students of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds from different perspectives: community, classroom, and school. Au believes that social communities often attempt to evaluate the academic success and failure of such students based on stigmatizing beliefs and overgeneralizations. Many people believe that schools should uphold only one form of literacy in mainstream society. As a result, the mainstream language becomes dominant, while the primary languages, family values, and cultural backgrounds of students are often devalued. In this paradigm, which Au calls the *Autonomous Model*, students of diverse backgrounds are often tested on their cognitive skills and literacy proficiency based on mainstream ideas that are as yet unfamiliar to them. Therefore, these students have difficulty developing a sense of ownership in the process of learning. The *Autonomous Model* does not teach students how to celebrate and respect differences in the processes of their literacy development. However, Au argues, not being proficient in one form of literacy do not mean that students are incapable of learning, because literacy development is the results of a process of social construction. Teaching students to value differences should be a fundamental emphasis in classrooms. She calls the concept of acknowledging multiple types of literacy the *Ideological Model*.

Au provides more specific examples of the *Ideological Model* within the classroom regarding the variations of English. She does not minimize the significance of students of diverse backgrounds learning Standard American English in order to participate as responsible citizens in our pluralistic society. However, being proficient in Standard American English and trying to conform to the language and behavior of the dominant culture do not lead students of diverse backgrounds to successful lives in the authentic society. Rather, according to Au, African-American Vernacular (AAVE) and non-mainstream English such as Hawaii Creole English (HCE) should be valued as alternate and acceptable forms of English, and should be infused into the literacy curricula by teachers in order to create culturally responsive learning environments.

In the latter part of her book, Au shifts the focus from classrooms to schools. According to her philosophy, shaping more culturally responsive learning environments requires changing school curricula. She argues that merely adopting and utilizing a packaged program as a new curriculum does not help provide students of diverse backgrounds with effective instruction. Instead, school curricula should be based on literacy

instruction adapted to each individual student's academic needs, while at the same time being consistent in quality. The desirable shape of the learning process is a spiral or a staircase, with some students learning at a narrower, more fundamental level, and others learning at a higher and broader plane. If all school personnel are fully involved in this new type of curriculum, the result will be a true ownership of educational reform. Students of diverse backgrounds will benefit from this ownership, and their literacy achievement will be dramatically enhanced.

Au, unlike some educators, does not unfairly blame students' failure to learn on preservice and inservice teachers who are not yet familiar with literacy instruction in multicultural classroom settings. Instead, her book is replete with practical advice and instructional ideas based on theory and recent research regarding literacy and multicultural education. This book is a significant addition to the core literature to teachers who attempt to practice culturally responsive literacy instruction with the goal of narrowing the literacy achievement gap manifested by students of diverse backgrounds.

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Au, K.H. (1993). *Literacy Instruction in Multicultural Settings*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

**Reviewed by Tadayuki Suzuki (Ph.D.), Assistant Professor of Literacy, Department of Special Instructional Programs, Western Kentucky University.**

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**Blevins, Wiley (2006). *Phonics from A to Z: A Practical Guide, Grades K-3*. Second edition. New York: Scholastic Teaching Resources.**

**Pages: 240    Price: \$23.99    ISBN: 0439845114**

As I sit down to write this review, my 12 year-old son stands over me looking at the title of the book and says: "Phonics? I thought you didn't like phonics!" I look up and smile at him. "That's not true," I answer. "I just like a balance in instruction. And besides," I continue "I really like this book. It focuses on the important stuff." My son wanders off as I reflect on my opinion.

I have been researching literacy acquisition for a while now and firmly believe (and teach) that it has an important place in early instruction; nevertheless, I find that many of the programs and books that are available do a poor job in effectively creating a balance of techniques. To my pleasant surprise, Blevins' book manages to do exactly that: provide a balanced, level-headed, and well thought out way of approaching phonics instruction.

Although I think that quality instruction of phonemic awareness and phonics is the key for early reading success, previous encounters with books on this topic have left me frustrated at the lack of thoughtful guidelines and balanced views of phonics instruction. *Phonics from A to Z* is actually one of the best guides I have found because of its grounded recommendations, balanced approach, and emphasis on efficiency. The book provides a thoughtfully constructed path to teach the phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle in the classroom

*Phonics from A to Z* is organized following a developmental path, starting with letter recognition and phonemic awareness then moving on to initial sound/letter recognition, letter sound correspondences, phonograms, and finally more complex patterns.

Each chapter opens with a brief but thoughtful introduction laying out rationale, information from seminal research, ideas about scope and sequence, and my favorite section: warnings. The warnings and cautionary notes help the reader find the balance between the skill focus of phonics and other elements in early reading instruction. For example, in a discussion about phonograms, there is a clear, cautionary note warning teachers to move beyond phonograms as they provide the "developing reader with only limited independence in word analysis" (p.160).

Another feature deserving of praise is the focus on efficiency of patterns though discussions about frequency and utility. For example, on page 117, a table presents the most frequent spelling of English sounds. This is an example of the author's effort to provide teachers with the information and tools to focus their phonics instruction. This book is much more than a set of phonics activities. It is a true guide for the teacher providing the why in addition to the what, when, and how. The book includes many useful lists found in other publications such as *The Teacher's Book of Lists*. The only difference is that here they are connected directly to the lesson ideas, thus providing much easier access and potential for integration.

## References

**Reviewed by Guy Trainin Ph.D., Great Plains Institute of Reading & Writing; Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education; College of Education and Human Sciences, University of Nebraska Lincoln**

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**Brand, Max & Brand, Gayle (2006). *Practical Fluency: Classroom Perspectives, Grades K-6*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.**

**Pages:118 Price: \$15.00 ISBN: 1-57110-410-0**

"Fluency is not one skill, but the orchestration of many skills" (p. 87). In order for students to become fluent readers and writers, they must decode words with automaticity, read at an acceptable rate of speed, recognize and appropriately chunk phrases, and self-monitor their reading; these are no small tasks. These skills will only be mastered with appropriate instruction, effective modeling and useful feedback.

Through their book, Max and Gayle Brand provide a practical guide to teaching and learning fluency skills within the elementary classroom. With actual examples of struggling students, the authors address specific problems that all elementary teachers encounter. The inclusion of realistic examples that demonstrate successful outcomes is a strength of the book that enhances its credibility. The authors share their perspectives from a range of grade levels. Max Brand teaches a 5th grade class, while Gayle Brand is a literacy teacher for a multiage classroom that includes grades 1 and 2. All of the suggestions shared within this book are practices that they have found to be useful and effective within their classrooms.

Often educators associate fluency with just reading; however, Brand and Brand also successfully address the need to develop writing fluency. This combined focus enhances the content of the book. Much like reading fluency, writing fluency requires explicit instruction, modeling, practice and feedback. By using explicit instruction for reading fluency, the teacher may then transfer the same knowledge to writing fluency. For example, if students are reading a poem that includes punctuation beyond the standard usage, the students must be taught its meaning and usage. In doing so, the same information is transferred into their writing practice as they create scenarios in which they use punctuation correctly in their writing.

The book is divided into 5 chapters. With the exception of chapter 1, an introduction, each chapter includes an instructional strategy and lesson plans for classroom teachers to implement. Even though the book only addresses four instructional strategies, these strategies are discussed in great detail. They include: 1) read-aloud, 2) rereading, 3) building stamina for fluent reading and writing, and 4) ongoing assessment. The book also includes rubrics to assist with assessment and templates that are useful for record keeping.

The book shares many ways in which students develop and strengthen their fluency skills. Based on the environment, daily routines, instructional strategies and assessment, the authors establish a variety of methods to build the necessary skills for students to become fluent readers and writers.

Brand and Brand identify the need to establish a "working literate environment" (p.11); the schedule and/or routine of the day creates the structure necessary to sustain fluency skills. The authors also demonstrate the need for an environment in which the students feel safe to practice and implement new skills without fear of failure. On any given day, the routine is complete with multiple tasks in which literacy skills are practiced. Both teachers fill the day with tasks such as morning messages, buddy reading, read alouds, independent reading and writing workshops.

During instruction, Brand and Brand set a purpose for fluent reading and writing. Once the purpose is developed, the skills are organized in the appropriate order needed for mastery of the identified skills. A blend of explicit instruction with actual demonstrations is the key method of teaching reading and writing fluency. "Learning to read and write fluently also requires multiple demonstrations. Reading demonstrations build a rationale for reading fluently." (p. 18). One of the most effective strategies for teaching fluency is modeling. Brand and Brand successfully demonstrate this strategy throughout their book. Modeling how to read poetically, reread passages, reading for a purpose, listening and using punctuation the way the author intended and making predictions all are demonstrated throughout the lessons of the day. Modeling also during content reading provides the example needed to teach students how to sort and organize information necessary to read and learn independently.

By using grouping practices that include large groups, small flexible groups and individual conferences, both authors demonstrate how to differentiate instruction. The groups change based on the needs of the students and the specific skills that are addressed. Large-group instruction can be used for read-alouds, shared reading and shared writing. (p. 87) Small flexible groups are used for the instruction of such skills as prosody or setting a purpose for fluency. The individual conferences allow for feedback specific to each child. All of

which demonstrate a commitment to meet the individual needs of students.

The importance of assessment in the development of fluency is apparent throughout the book. Information is gathered through a variety of ways such as observations, running records, writing samples and reading logs. This information is used for discussions with students during conferences. Assessment results also are a way to organize students into small groups.

The authors use effective strategies to teach students how to develop and implement self-assessment strategies. Through the use of reading logs students monitor their own progress, set goals, reflect on their reading rate/pace, and gain understanding of texts in their independent reading. (p. 89) These skills teach students to be reliant upon themselves for their source of correction or feedback. They must learn to decide for themselves their strengths and weaknesses.

The apparent purpose of the book is to allow teachers in the classroom to share with others who are also in the classroom, practical strategies and methods to improve reading and writing fluency. Brand and Brand share examples in which fluency instruction is taught in all content and throughout the day. With the use of open dialogue between teacher/student and student/student, the students develop skills necessary to become fluent readers and writers. Teachers are continually searching for new ideas and creative methods to address difficult skills such as fluency. This book provides useful and practical strategies that could be implemented in all grade levels.

This textbook would be especially useful for a graduate reading course. Within such a course, graduate students would bring fundamental knowledge of struggling elementary students, questions on how to reach these lower-achieving students and a desire to learn new innovative ways to teach reading and writing fluency. *Practical Fluency* would stimulate discussion, provide answers and include instructional strategies that could be easily implemented. I would very much enjoy teaching such a course or being a member of the audience.

**Reviewed by Renee Murley, Ed. D, Assistant Clinical Professor of Special Education at the University of Memphis – Jackson Center. Email: reneelee@memphis.edu**

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**Bresser, Rusty & Holtzman, Caren (2006). *Minilessons for Math Practice: Grades K-2*. Sausalito, CA: Math Solutions.**

**Pages: 159 Price: \$24.00 ISBN: 978-0-941355-74-2**

*Minilessons for Math Practice* is a collection of supplemental activities designed to be used with any existing primary math curriculum. According to the authors, the purpose of the book is to broaden the mathematics curriculum and opportunities for doing mathematics in primary classrooms by providing teachers with minilessons that “offer ideas for quick activities that can be used in various contexts.”

The book is composed of 27 activities covering topics important to elementary mathematics: Number and Operations, Algebra, Geometry, Measurement, and Data Analysis and Probability. As one might expect, the vast majority of these activities are related to number and operations (20 of 27 activities) and the fewest are devoted to geometry (1 of 27). It should be noted that in addition to the 27 activities, the authors have suggested ways to extend each activity so that potentially many more minilessons can be taught throughout the year depending on the classroom needs of each individual teacher.

While the minilessons are intended to be brief (the authors estimate 5-20 minutes depending on the activity and when it is taught), they share a common focus on promoting classroom discussion. Each activity has the following components: an overview describing the activity and the mathematics involved; a list of suggested materials to use with the minilesson; step-by-step teaching directions; a list of questions to ask students during the lesson; a vignette that describes the authors’ experience demonstrating the lesson in another teacher’s classroom; and ideas for modifying the minilesson so similar minilessons can be generated for future use as needed.

There are many things I like about this book. I like the idea of trying to broaden the math curriculum not through replacement units but through brief *supplemental* minilessons that are designed to be used during transition times. I think this approach, by seeking to augment without competing for time with the existing math curriculum, makes a lot of sense and avoids some of the institutional barriers that can derail efforts to broaden the mathematics taught in schools. In these days where schools are requiring teachers to follow detailed curriculum guides, I think this flexibility will be appreciated.

I also like the classroom vignettes, which are detailed enough descriptions of the actions and discourse in a classroom to provide the reader with an example of what an enacted minilesson *could* look like. Besides

being helpful to teachers wishing to learn to use the activities in this book, I think the vignettes have possible additional uses in preservice teacher preparation. As a teacher educator, I know how difficult it is to find detailed cases of teaching subject matter, and these are among the best I have come across. I think these vignettes model many clever routines and teacher discourse moves that generalize to many teaching situations and therefore could be a particularly valuable resource in preparing novice or aspiring teachers.

However, I do have several concerns, particularly regarding some of the claims made by the authors. For example, the authors state that the activities “*take little or no preparation. They are easy to implement.*” No data or references to field studies to support this assertion are cited. My own personal experience working with primary school teachers and my inspection of the activities in this book makes me skeptical of this claim. My guess is that teachers, unless they are very experienced and have used activities similar to the ones described in this book, will need to not only read the step by step directions but also the accompanying vignettes to adequately understand these activities. Additional time trying these activities out and reflecting on the process will also likely be necessary before implementation will be accomplished with high fidelity.

Another related concern I have is that the authors provide teachers with little guidance on how to choose or when to use minilessons in their classroom. Since the minilessons are designed to be a set of supplemental stand-alone activities and not part of a sequenced curriculum, decisions about when and which activities to use will need to be made. If these decisions are not made thoughtfully, the mathematical power of these activities could become less potent, and have the potential to be experienced by students as yet another set of uncoordinated mathematical activities that do not necessarily connect to mathematics being learned in the regular math curriculum.

All in all, *Minilessons for Math Practice* offers primary classroom teachers practical and useful ideas to supplement their existing mathematics curriculum. The activities in this book are thoughtful and are likely to encourage mathematical thinking. The flexibility offered by these minilessons should be welcomed by teachers interested in broadening the mathematics curriculum. In the hands of an experienced and reflective teacher, I think this book has a very good chance of successfully helping to meet that goal.

**Reviewed by Anthony J. Gabriele Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Educational Psychology and Foundations, University of Northern Iowa**

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**Brownlie, Faye; Feniak, Catherine & Schnellert, Leyton (2006). *Student Diversity: Classroom Strategies to Meet the Learning Needs of All Students*. Second edition. Markham, Ontario: Pembroke Publishers, distributed by Stenhouse.**

**Pages: 138    Price: 428.00    ISBN: 1-55138-198-2**

According to Brownlie, Feniak and Schnellert, this second edition of *Student Diversity* is motivated by current media debates on teachers' so called, lack of both *time* and *tools* for addressing the needs of all students in all classrooms. In the introduction the authors appeal to the timeliness of this publication in its dealing with diversity issues by providing new alternatives for the ways ahead. The claim is that old and traditional teaching methods no longer work, and the book offers material for a variety of classroom activities that address diversity from an inclusive pedagogical perspective.

The aim of the book is twofold. The first objective is a provision of new student learning support tools for the classroom. These will subsequently reduce curriculum and lesson planning time whilst increasing efficacy of student learning (second objective). The classroom activity curricula target grades four to ten.

The book is structured into eleven chapters addressing diversity in the curriculum of content-areas using literacy and numeracy skills; constructivist, cognitive, cooperative and strategic approaches. Each chapter offers a conceptual introduction followed by a structured sequence of sample activities. The described activities include user-friendly templates of handouts

The book is written in a reader friendly style that avoids complicated jargon and is easily accessible by beginning teachers, teacher aids and teacher educators. The sequences of the structured activities are easy to follow and provide a narrative of application in actual classrooms.

This second edition provides additional materials on narrative construction and personal writing. Innovative ideas on approaching diversity within the sometimes anxiety provoking subject of "maths" are also presented. The book is well worth a read and is a valuable teaching resource of practical examples to be trialled in all classrooms around the world.

**Reviewed by Dr. Meeri Hellstén, senior lecturer in the School of Education, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia. Areas of interest: international pedagogy, multiculturalism and diversity in education,**

**Cerra, Cheli & Jacoby, Ruth (2006). *Homework Talk!: The Art of Effective Communication About Your Child's Homework*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.**

**Pages: 151    Price: \$14.95    ISBN: 0-787-98273-3**

Designed for parents of students in the upper elementary grades, *Homework Talk!: The Art of Effective Communication About Your Child's Homework* is a rich reference book that provides potential strategies for helping students who struggle with homework completion. Both of the book's authors are school principals as well as parents. They have worked with numerous families in designing homework plans that assist even resistant students in completing their assignments thoroughly and carefully.

Through the acronym, POWER, the authors provide a basic framework for their book in its introduction. They encourage parents to be **p**roactive in working with their schools, **o**rganized in their efforts, and **w**ell-prepared with materials for their children. The authors also stress **e**ffective communication among family members as well as periodic **r**eflection about those strategies that have seemingly worked and others that appear to have failed.

Divided into five chapters that are easy to read, this book is consistent in its format. Within each chapter are multiple questions that parents might ask in working with their children to develop successful plans for homework completion. Such questions range from "Why should my child do homework?" to "How can I help my child to avoid frustration?" In fact, the authors gather a total of fifty-two questions that parents have posed to them or that they have asked of themselves. Each question is phrased in a straightforward manner and is one that has undoubtedly been asked by countless other parents of elementary school children.

Frequently adjacent to the snapshot question is the scenario that inspired the question. Each scenario is a paragraph in length and represents the context behind the authors' inclusion of the snapshot question in the chapter. Although these scenarios are interesting to read, most (if not all) of the questions can be easily understood without this background information.

Following each question is the authors' response to the posed snapshot question. The responses are at least one paragraph in length and provide parents with useful suggestions for ways in which they can help their children to complete homework successfully. Typical responses include ways to organize materials, strategies to schedule time after school, and methods to reinforce desirable homework habits. Of particular note is the importance that is placed on the development of partnerships among parents, teachers, and students. In short, the authors provide concrete measures that parents and children can utilize in developing a successful homework environment.

In addition to the answers that the authors provide are various resources that parents might use as they read *Homework Talk!*. For example, the book begins with a survey that parents should complete in order for them to determine their pre-existing beliefs in regard to homework. Also, the book ends with activities (in the appendices) that are frequently geared for parents and children to complete together. Embedded between chapters of the book, furthermore, are questions for parents to ask themselves as they reflect upon their implementation of the authors' suggested strategies.

Although this book is not necessarily designed for educators, those teachers who assign homework in multiple subject areas each day may find the snapshot questions to be interesting and the candid responses to be enlightening. Even though the authors indicate that homework assignments can begin as early as the primary grades, the targeted audience for this helpful text is any adult who works with children as they juggle the challenge of organizing, completing, and submitting multiple homework assignments on a daily basis.

**Reviewed by Christopher Palmi. Palmi teaches English methods courses at National-Louis University. He is also a public school educator in the North Shore suburbs of Chicago.**

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**Darling-Hammond, Linda (2006). *Powerful Teacher Education: Lesson From Exemplary Programs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.**

**Pages: 448    Price: \$32.00    ISBN: 0-7879-7273-8**

Criticism of teacher education programs is nothing new. In their 1988 book *Ed School* (a book which calls for sweeping changes in teacher education programs) Clifford and Guthrie ask "What is it about teaching and the

training of teachers that is so vulnerable to attack and criticism?" (p. 43). Clifford and Guthrie supplied no answer to their question, and the attacks and criticisms have continued, although in some cases supported by little research. Some of the critics include *The Miseducation of American Teachers* by James D. Koerner in 1963, *Educational Wastelands* by Arthur Bestor in 1985, *Education's Smoking Gun: How Teachers Colleges Have Destroyed Education in America* by Reginald G. Damerell in 1985, *Ed School Follies* by Rita Kramer in 1991, and more recently *The Trouble with Ed Schools* by David Larabee in 2004. Even the classic history of teacher education schools, *And Sadly Teach* published by Jurgen Herbst in 1989, bemoans the status of teachers and pleas for the reform of teacher education. John Goodlad's influential book published in 1990, *Places Where Teachers are Taught*, was also critical of the state of teacher education and called for change. Several influential reports have also called for major reforms.

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* spurred reforms and set the stage for two major reports published in 1986, *Tomorrow's Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group* and *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (also known as the Carnegie Report). As a result, numerous attempts at reform have been undertaken. Despite seeming progress, however, earlier this year Arthur Levine's report *Educating School Teachers* declared that "Teacher education is the Dodge City of the education world. Like the fabled Wild West town, it is unruly and chaotic. There is no standard approach to where and how teachers should be prepared..." (p. 110). The Levine report received considerable attention and was mentioned in such publications as the Wall Street Journal and the Chronicle of Higher Education.

*Powerful Teacher Education: Lessons from Exemplary Programs* also was published earlier this year, but it has received considerably less attention than the Levine report. This is unfortunate because it is an important book that should be widely read. Even though teacher education programs have been widely criticized for years, now the stakes seem higher than ever before. Government officials and policy makers are currently among the most vocal in criticizing teacher education programs. In her introduction, Darling-Hammond quotes former U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, who argued in 2002 that "burdensome requirements" for education course-work that make up "the bulk of current teacher certification regimes" should be removed from teacher certification standards (p. 6). Later in the book, she points out that alternative and emergency certifications are being encouraged even though the market does not demand such measures. Darling-Hammond may well have had the current policy-makers and their emphasis on "scientific" and "evidence-based" research in mind when she wrote this book. If what they are looking for is solid research, they need look no further.

Instead of rehashing the usual litany of faults committed by schools of education, Darling-Hammond identifies colleges that are known to produce highly successful teachers and examines what they do that sets them apart. She systematically refutes what she identifies as two widespread and pernicious myths: the notion that "good teachers are born and not made" and that "good teacher education programs are virtually nonexistent and perhaps even impossible to construct" (p ix). Darling-Hammond, a Professor of Education at Stanford University, has impeccable academic credentials and a long list of publications to her credit. She carefully analyzes previous research and gives a thorough explanation of her own methodology. She points out that research has shown that good teacher preparation does make a difference, and she examines how seven quality teacher education programs prepare future teachers. The programs she selected represent a variety of sizes and types. They include Alverno College, Bank Street College, Trinity University, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Southern Maine, the University of Virginia, and Wheelock College.

The message of the book is encouraging, but it is also sobering. Yes, it is possible to implement exemplary programs which will produce highly successful teachers. However, doing so will be difficult. In some cases, it will be necessary to change the whole institutional culture. Practices adopted by some of the colleges (particularly Alverno College) probably cannot be replicated by most colleges, especially by larger schools. In some cases (notably Berkeley), the strong leadership and collaborative efforts that produced exemplary programs may not be ultimately sustainable. Although each of the seven programs is unique, among the common elements Darling-Hammond identifies are 1) coherence based on a common, clear vision of good teaching... 2) a strong core curriculum... 3) extensive, connected clinical experiences that are carefully chosen... 4) an inquiry approach that connects theory and practice... 5) school- university partnerships that develop common knowledge and shared beliefs among school- and university-based faculty, and 6) assessment based on professional standards that evaluates teaching through demonstrations of critical skills and abilities using performance assessments and portfolios... (p. 276-277). The type of financial resources and the fundamental changes that would be required to implement all of these elements leave the reader with the clear impression that many current programs will not be able to measure up.

*Powerful Teacher Education* is a compelling book. It presents solid research, but at the same time it is highly readable. In the preface of the book, Darling-Hammond immediately engages the reader by telling of her own experiences, both as a teacher (one who started teaching after a brief summer training) and as a parent (the parent of a child who was struggling). Throughout the book, interviews and examples engage the reader. She never forgets that it is the children who are the reason behind her endeavors. She has no doubt, and leaves the reader with no doubt, that teacher education is of critical importance.

All libraries serving schools with teacher education programs should own this book. In fact, the question may not be whether to purchase it, but how many copies to purchase.

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Reviewed by Sharon Naylor, Illinois State University

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**Delany, Marcia (2006). *Fluency Strategies for Struggling Readers: Classroom-Tested Oral Reading Strategies That Help Build Comprehension, Grades 1-3*. New York: Scholastic.**

**Pages: 128    Price: \$17.99    ISBN: 0-439-60970-4**

Fluency was my problem in elementary school. I hated reading. As a struggling reader I did not realize there was an easy solution to my problem: Practice! As a student I read as little as possible therefore my comprehension suffered. I finally received some help very early in college. I enrolled in a class called "Improve Your Reading." Every week there was a timed reading and a comprehension test. Each week my reading speed and comprehension improved. My reading rate was the problem. I started reading for fun and, of course, for my college classes. That was when I realized I loved to read.

Comprehension is the goal of reading and fluency is the key to comprehension. A quote from Fuch et al., "...oral reading fluency from text serves to predict reading comprehension,." (2001) emphasizes the importance of oral reading fluency. The question is how can teachers develop good oral reading fluency?

First, teachers have to diagnose the problem. Delany developed a chart that maps ten different oral reading problems and aligns each one to a lesson. Years of work have help Delany develop this "Disfluency Symptoms Chart." This chart lists the fluency symptoms, components, and the lessons to help resolve fluency problems. Delany shares 20 fluency lessons for specific problems. Each chapter details real life examples of struggling readers then explains several solutions to the problem. These solutions include activities and games from letter naming to reading passages, that building oral reading fluency.

For beginning teachers that are new to reading fluency problems, the terms and definitions are listed in the front of the book. Veteran teachers will know most of the terms but might not know the connected teaching strategy for each fluency problem. Assessments are included in chapter 5 to help teachers determine which readers are in need of fluency-targeted instruction. This book focuses on simple, practical, fluency lessons



for teachers to use with struggling readers.

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**Reviewed by Dr. Sandy Thomas, Reading Specialist/Coach, Snow Rogers Elementary School, Gardendale, Alabama**

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## **Duncan, Marilyn (2006). *Literacy Coaching: Developing Effective Teachers Through Instructional Dialogue*. Katonah, NY: Richard C. Owen Publishers.**

**Pages: 97 Price: \$24.95 ISBN: 1572748656**

This monograph is one of a series offered by The Learning Network Solutions, an organization developed by teachers and administrators and designed for "increasing student achievement and improving schools." In the first pages of the work, the network promotes this work as:

Instructional dialogue is a key component of successful coaching and instructional leadership. It describes professional conversations that can occur between teachers and coaches in which the teacher is guided toward new learning and practice. This book provides information and support for implementing and sustaining the use of instructional dialogue in order to work more effectively with teachers.

Following this page of information, the Table of Contents divides the work into three parts: 1) Laying a foundation for reflective teaching; 2) Implementing a process for instructional dialogue; and 3) Ensuring that the process of instructional dialogue works.

In the preface, the author explains that there is an "emphasis on student learning as a measure of effective instructional practice" and the "goal of training teacher leaders is to provide professional development that is job embedded: that focuses on improving student achievement by improving the effectiveness of classroom practice" (p. vii). Duncan describes the three parts of the work as divided into defining what instructional dialogue is, how instructional dialogue works, and why instructional dialogue is important. She further identifies two themes for this handbook as that of collegiality and of developing mutual respect and trust.

The contents of this monograph revolve around specific examples of teaching situations, developed action plans for improving daily instruction, and transcripts of actual professional conversations to illustrate the working relationship between teacher and coach. As the author sets the scene, explains each teaching situation, and provides samples of verbal exchanges, she offers hints regarding note taking and active listening to facilitate the advancement of mutual insight and understanding for teacher and coach. She mentions the need for quality feedback and delineates the instructional dialogue process through descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of teacher and coach that rely on commitment to change to improve instruction and consequently student achievement. Emphasizing the role of coach as non-judgmental or evaluative, she notes the importance of identifying and building upon the teacher's strengths. In terms of the teacher, she expects teachers to be willing to learn and to reflect upon the challenges they face and the changes they hope to effect.

Since the author demonstrates the necessary structure of "instructional dialogue" conversations to enable a challenge to be identified, discussed, and addressed differently from past practice, she outlines questioning techniques and collegiality as important to developing successful action plans for teachers to implement. The role of the coach in observing the teacher's attempts to follow the newly devised action plan and in debriefing with the teacher afterwards demonstrates the on-going nature of the process. The last sections address school-wide approaches to introducing literacy coaching and offer principles of effective instructional dialogue. A DVD accompanies the monograph so readers can listen to an actual instructional dialogue between coach and teacher.

This monograph is considered a handbook by the author (p.ix). It is short (97 pages), but unfortunately very repetitious. Nearly every chapter repeats the definition and point of instructional dialogue, as quoted above. The introduction of each scenario, the transcript of the dialogue for each scenario, and the following explanation are also very redundant. Few new ideas are expressed from one stage to the next for each specific scenario. While the term "instructional dialogue" appears, the concepts behind it are those of literacy coaching. The sparse references to research (there are only 29 works cited) omit major works in the field. A literacy coach or teacher trying to develop the professional relationship this relatively recent form of collaboration requires would find little new here.

NCTE and IRA developed guidelines for literacy coaching and posted them in November 2005 (see Literacy Coaches page on the NCTE Site) and have recently created an online Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse (<http://www.literacycoachingonline.org/>). Among the long list of resources available, Cathy Toll's *The literacy coach's survival guide: Essential questions and practical answers* (2005) and Jane A. G. Kise's *Differentiated coaching* (2006) give far more substantial explanations and guidance in developing effective literacy coaching relationships between teacher and coach.

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**Reviewed by Patricia A. Gross, Ed.D., Associate Professor of Education, The University of Scranton**

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**Felux, Carolyn & Snowdy, Paula, editors (2006). *The Math Coach Field Guide: Charting Your Course*. Sausalito, CA: Math Solutions.**

**Pages: 144 Price: \$16.50 ISBN: 0-941355-72-1**

Math coaches serve young people by providing one-on-one coaching to students struggling in mathematics. Each coach is responsible for providing weekly in-person tutoring assistance to elementary, middle, or high school students using resources provided by the schools. Math coaches and specialists assigned the task of improving mathematics instruction face an enormous and complex challenge. Being a math coach is about more than what one can do for students. The math coach models instruction for teachers, observes the teachers as they practice the skills they have learned, and helps teachers to become more self-directed and reflective.

Most coaches take on this responsibility with a title and a charge, but seldom with a road map. *The Math Coach Field Guide: Charting Your Course* provides just the kind of guidance needed to help coaches in this demanding and often undefined role as they strive to support teachers in their teaching of math. In this collection of 11 essays, veteran math coaches share their expertise, providing glimpses into the unique trials, false starts, and successes they have experienced in their positions.

Some of the authors come with a broad approach that identifies the landscape of the coach's role. Chris Confer describes ten guiding principles that evolved over the years and offers specific suggestions for implementing them. Patricia Smith distills her years of experience into guidelines that are both informative and provocative. Winifred Findley chronicles her process for helping teachers take ownership for their classroom math teaching and learning.

Others, however, narrow their focus and tell how they grappled with particular questions and situations, weaving through their descriptions broader issues of their work. Robyn Silbey tackles the question of how best to ensure teacher involvement when she teaches demonstration lessons in their classrooms. Her chapter presents the observation process she developed for teachers to use, along with the framework she follows to implement it. Leyani Von Rotz describes a "math bulletin board" on which grade-level teams post examples of their students' work to develop a clearer sense of how the K-6 mathematics curriculum progresses. She explains how this broader understanding helps teachers articulate more focused expectations. Erich Zeller identifies analyzing arithmetic instruction as the focus for his school. He proposes that if teachers can achieve a shift in teaching arithmetic—the cornerstone of elementary mathematics—they can then build on this shift to think about the other areas of the math curriculum.

Ongoing research into school culture, change, and improvement is finding that success is more likely when teachers are collegial and work collaboratively on improvement activities (Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991). Collegial relationships exist when people discuss problems and difficulties, share ideas and knowledge, exchange techniques and approaches, observe one another's work, and collaborate on instructional projects (Little, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1989; Smylie, 1988). In schools where collegiality is the norm, these professional, interactive, supportive relationships are accepted, enhanced, and socially encouraged (Little, 1982). Such relationships have a key impact on schools and provide the opportunity for teachers to work together on improvement activities.

Creating and maintaining a collaborative culture among the math coaches is specifically the focus in some of the chapters. Stephanie Sheffield sheds light on what has (and hasn't) worked for them as they focus on enhancing teachers' talents and abilities through creating and sustaining collaborative teaching teams. Karolyn Williams & Chris Confer describe their co-teaching experience and present how they tackled a particular teaching question: How do we get students to transfer what they know and understand about multiplication and division to long division? Their chapter reveals how they worked together to question and improve their instructional decisions.

In addition to all these different aspects of math coaching, some of the authors provide examples of curriculum and standards adoption processes they implemented. Marie Brigham & Kristen Berthao provide rationale, direction, and results that can guide others who engage in a curriculum adoption process. Rosalyn Haberkern describes her work with a team of teachers to develop and modify a specific lesson to be taught to third graders in a lesson study cycle, a process that not only produces a model lesson but also helps the team of teachers collaborate and become interdependent.

Overall, *The Math Coach Field Guide, Charting your Course* is an excellent book for math coaches who seek innovative approaches to mentor their students. The editors and authors in this book successfully pass on their experiences and ideas for math coaches to apply in a variety of different learning environments, enabling them to implement educational practices that positively impact the academic achievement of their students. There is no doubt that this book should be a vital element in all math coaches' libraries and a spark to keep their enthusiasm burning.

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**Reviewed by Dr. Zafer Unal, Assistant Professor, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg**

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## **Fornshell, Antoinette Cerulli (2006). *Best Practices for Planning Reading & Writing Instruction, Grades 3-5*. New York: Scholastic.**

**Pages: 128    Price: \$17.99    ISBN: 0439365961**

The book *Best Practices for Planning Reading and Writing Instruction* is a complete and useful introduction to resources and strategies for teachers at higher elementary grades engaged in reading and writing instruction using a comprehensive approach.

The author closely follows the balanced literacy program described by Fountas and Pinell (2001). Fornshell proposes to extend the strategies that support a comprehensive model for reading instruction into writing. She calls this a "comprehensive literacy program" (p. 55). Nevertheless, the author's claims are highly problematic. She states that "a comprehensive literacy program starts with a much broader definition of getting the job done: good test scores are important especially in the political changed arena that education has become. But how sad if that is our only measure of success in literacy teaching" (Fornshell, p. 6). The book presents tensions between the benefits and learning gains that a comprehensive literacy program could bring, and the additional goal of presenting the program as the best vehicle to achieve success is standardized tests.

Compared to other books for practitioners, the book resonates with the intention of providing a *recipe* for success as long as it is followed (p. 7). The author provides examples and formats for reading and writing "study units" and matrices for the creation of lessons plans. The book is rich in models, patterns, and guidelines for the organization of reading and writing workshops, (pp. 59-61) which are strategies that have proven to be extremely beneficial to student learning of reading and writing at elementary grade levels. However, the detailed illustrations of specific techniques could confuse readers trying to understand the

balanced literacy approach that supports them. The minutia in the descriptions of the workshop model also obscure the plan proposed as a cognitive approach to reading instruction.

Fornshell (2006) proposes the paradoxical notion that: "authentic assessment should drive instruction" (p. 7). The author also claims that the support of her literacy work is in the "new standards project" (p. 42), which "focuses on using assessment to drive instruction" (p. 42). This view contradicts the philosophical foundations of cognitive approaches to teaching and learning. Nonetheless, the author returns constantly to that notion to support the choice of a comprehensive literacy plan.

The most critical features in this book are the ways in which teachers and their pedagogy in reading instruction are portrayed. First, the author proposes the notion of intentional teaching, or what she describes as "teaching with intentions" (p. 11). The highly specific descriptions of intentional teaching make apparent an almost objectivistic approach to reading instruction which the author claims she opposes while adopting the balanced literacy approach (p. 14). Second, the author describes the idea of "good teaching" as "effective test prep". Fornshell explains that teachers should "train students" and "intentionally" plan to get students to excel in the tests (p. 19). The author also presents fragments from other works as pieces of advice or vignettes for teachers to learn from (p. 22). The books that are quoted or referenced are not scholarly books or books rooted in systematic observations or longitudinal data. Once again, in a book for practitioners, the knowledge of others, not necessarily scientifically constructed, is positioned as more significant than the practitioners' own knowledge and expertise.

This work although rich in examples and instructional models for teaching reading and writing, also comes down to oversimplified notions, such as: "students need access to books they can read" (pp. 48-49). Furthermore, when the author describes how to organize and set up writing workshops she presents "bottom line expectations" for them (p. 59). These expectations, such as "students write whole texts that carry their own thinking" (p. 59), sound perhaps rather prescriptive or restricted to teachers who are actually working with students in the classrooms.

In conclusion, the book offers extremely resourceful material for teachers interested in approaching reading instruction from a comprehensive approach. Nevertheless, it contains contradictory and paradoxical ideas related to teachers and reading instruction that make it difficult to pick out the contributions that this book can bring to teachers in the classroom.

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**Reviewed by Gabriela Silvestre, Doctoral Candidate, Administrative and Policy Studies Department, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh.**

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**Fry, Edward B. & Kress, Jacqueline E. (2006). *The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists*. Fifth Edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.**

**Pages: 524    Price: \$29.95    ISBN: 0-7879-8257-1**

Authors Fry and Kress have been producing and publishing *The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists* since 1984. Along with other education-oriented books of lists offered by Jossey-Bass, this latest (fifth) edition, created specifically for instructors of reading and literacy, offers a surprising variety of useful resources that have been updated to include very recent offerings available via the World Wide Web. An entire section on using the Internet as a resource for reading instruction provides such practical information as Tips for Searching the Web, and Web Sites for Children's Literature.

The fifth edition is comprised of 18 sections and 218 separate lists, containing useful and easily accessible information, in the form of lists, in such common reading instruction topics as Phonics, Fluency, Comprehension, Assessment, and Vocabulary Builders. But the book also contains almost esoteric information in lists dedicated to Children's Humor, Strange Reading Research, Foreign Alphabets, and Teacher's Correction Marks, wherein the mysteries of error-indicating abbreviations are revealed. (Ever wonder what "pass" meant when scrawled in your paper's margin? Why, "misuse of passive voice," of course!)

The majority of the book's content is dedicated to very practical information, and its availability in the form of

lists makes researching topics related or specific to reading and literacy instruction a pleasure. All the content is searchable by both the book's table of contents sections and subsections, and in a detailed ten-page index.

I must mention that when I first received the *The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists*, I brought the book with me to a meeting where several veteran university professors, all specialized in K-12 reading instruction, were present. As I took the book out, two professors immediately identified it as a terrific resource they had used for years, and a third wanted to purchase the book for a reading program in the local school district after perusing its contents. I couldn't provide a better endorsement for the book.

**Reviewed by Lee Allen, Assistant Professor, Department of Instruction and Curriculum Leadership, University of Memphis and consultant for the Memphis Content Literacy Academy/Memphis Striving Readers project.**

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**Justice, Paul W. (2004) *Relevant Linguistics: An Introduction to the Structure and Use of English for Teachers*. Second edition. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.**

**Pages: 311    Price: \$28.00    ISBN: 1-57586-218-2**

Paul Justice's *Relevant Linguistics: An Introduction to the Structure and Use of English for Teachers* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) is a very well organized and lucid introduction to the basic concepts of linguistics. As classrooms become more diversified linguistically, teachers are beginning to realize the importance of knowledge of linguistics. This book does a good job of presenting these concepts in a simple, graspable, relevant manner without oversimplifying them. The tone of the discussion is conversational and non-intimidating, which is very appropriate given the unfamiliarity of the topic to most teachers.

The organization of the book is logical: it progresses from the smallest unit of sound to the word and phrase levels, ending with the use of language in society. The systematic nature of language is well conveyed from the questions raised in each chapter and the numerous examples provided to demonstrate a point. Further, the exercises infused into the discussion of an issue, as the discussion progresses, allow the student to pause, reflect and apply the idea at hand. This method of problem solving as the dialog advances is an example of effective teaching that prospective teachers should themselves adopt in their classrooms.

In Chapter 1, "What is Linguistics?" the author discusses the nature of language and linguists' goals. He addresses some common misconceptions about language, such as "Linguistics is not relevant for primary and secondary school teachers" and "Linguistics is concerned with trying to get people to speak properly." From the start, thus, Justice establishes the important place of linguistics in teachers' training and in the classroom. However, this section could have been strengthened by emphasizing that linguists are concerned with the speech of the average speaker, not necessarily the elite, and that linguists' goals regarding studying language are not only descriptive, but also explanatory.

Chapter 2, "Phonetics: The Sounds of English," discusses the linguistic features of sounds and their orthographic representations. The exercises at the end of the chapter are interesting and contemporary for the average student (e.g., transcription of celebrity names, lines from songs, jokes). Chapter 3, "Phonology: The Sound System of English" takes the student through the steps of phonological rule formation very carefully and clearly. Through these examples, the student is able to see the levels of representation quite transparently and logically. Rules relating to aspiration, nasalization, phonotactics, and others are those that the average teacher encounters regularly in the classroom. Further, the author uses examples from a variety of languages such as Spanish, Japanese, and Vietnamese, which are pertinent to the student populations in many American classrooms. Providing contrastive analyses between each of these languages and English gives the teacher a clear understanding of the potential problems an English language learner might face. This feature makes the book relevant to the linguistics student at yet another level.

Chapters 4 and 5, "Morphology" and "Where Morphology Meets Phonology" present a discussion of the internal structures of words of different grammatical categories. Justice raises important issues that most traditional grammar books fail to touch: the interaction of morphology and phonology. In discussing allomorphic variation, the author could have considered using a more transparent example (such as the plural and/or the past tense morphemes, which come later in the chapter) first, instead of the negative prefix.

By the time the student arrives at Chapter 6, "Syntax: English Phrase and Sentence Structure," the fundamental concepts of the sound and word levels are clear and meaningful, making for an easy transition to the level of the sentence. At this larger grouping level, the author tackles the familiar grammatical categories of the parts of speech. Here again, ample examples are provided. However, the student might have benefited from being exposed to multiple methods of determining, for instance, the subject of a sentence, through subject-verb agreement, tag question formation, head features, etc. Some English grammar textbooks

(LeTourneau, 2001) approach the same concept from different angles, thus making it possible for students to grasp the idea from more than one way. Justice has kept the tree diagrams simple, and rightly so, in order to convey the hierarchical structure of a sentence clearly, without its intricacies which are not necessarily relevant for the purpose of this book

The last chapter of the book, "Language Variation: English Dialects," takes the entire discussion into the arena of use. Topics here are undoubtedly relevant to the teacher who encounters multiple dialects of English in one classroom. The author explains absolute and relative grammatical judgments, the crossroad of correctness vs. appropriateness, as well as the types and levels of dialects. The chapter and the book end with reminding the student of the need for bidialectalism today, in order to be more adaptable and proficient in one's interactions.

Paul W. Justice's book, as user-friendly as it already is, might have benefited further by incorporating additional resources and references to useful websites where, for example, students may be able to locate animations of the articulatory mechanism while studying Chapter 2, or hear various dialects as discussed in Chapter 7. (The glossary of terms and appendix of additional information are useful, but the latter is not comprehensive.) Adding extension activities at the end of each chapter would provide additional challenge and interest for the student who wishes to pursue a topic further. These activities can be designed to be used for collaborative learning or individual projects, aimed at making the student apply the information learned. Finally, as is done in a popular introductory text (Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams, 2007), every chapter could include quotations, comic strips, jokes, and other topical material, not only to make a point clear, but also to add a touch of humor to the otherwise serious charge of analyzing language. This would fit in well with the appealing tone of the writing in the book. Finally, the book has a few typographical errors which, however minor, may be distracting to the student.

Without a doubt, this book is useful, informative, and relevant for the average teacher who has had little or no prior exposure to linguistics, but who recognizes the need to understand the science of language.

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**Reviewed by Jaya S. Goswami, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, Department of Bilingual Education, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Kingsville, TX. E-mail: [jaya.goswami@tamuk.edu](mailto:jaya.goswami@tamuk.edu)**

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## **Kinash, Shelley (2006). *Seeing Beyond Blindness*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.**

**Pages: 201 Price: \$50.00(hardcover); \$25.00(paperback) ISBN: 1-59311-522-9(hardcover); 1-59311-521-0(paperback)**

Beginning the work as a socio historical, philosophical and epistemological treatise on blindness, Kinash quickly moves to a comprehensive study of seven blind online learners in post secondary programs. She details the effect of "visio-centric" modern technology and its obsession with visual design on their discourse and their lives. The difficulties of translating the experience of blind subjects and their use of technology in online learning experiences to statistical analysis is complicated. The book presents a qualitative inquiry in the interpretive domain through the personal words and stories of the blind learners. There is an extensive review of the process woven throughout the chapters which clearly explicates the thorough data collection and analysis.

The stories of the blind online learners are riveting and revealing. The research question centered on "What is like to be an online learner?" rather than "What is it like to be a blind online learner?" Each learner had markedly differing learning or outcome goals; each used a variety of online adaptive tools; each had difficulty with access in some form in their online learning experiences.

Written from a philosophical frame of universal design, this book asks provocative and troubling questions about the design and use of technology to advance learning and the development of accessible and interactive technological tools. The text has applications in university classrooms advancing the use of universal design, technological product development and technology inclusion as a postsecondary learning tool.

**Reviewed by Kathleen S. Cooter, University of Memphis.**

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**Leograndis, Denise (2006). *Fluent Writing: How To Teach the Art of Pacing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

**Pages: 194 Price: \$22.00 ISBN: 0325008264**

*Fluent Writing* is the result of a seemingly small incident. Reviewing the third grade writing standards from the National Center on Education and the Economy, Leograndis noted the pacing skill listed as "essential." Being uncertain of the meaning of the term, Leograndis looked for a definition. Finding little readily at hand, she set herself on a quest to learn as much as she could about the concept of pacing. Her fellow writing teachers will be glad she did! This book is the result.

Leograndis defines pacing as "all that makes the flow, the balance, the rhythm of writing" (p. 11). In the introduction, she sums up the book this way:

Fluent writing reads fluently because it is paced well...We know when music sounds good, when colors look right on a canvas, and when writing reads well. Good writing has a flow, a balance, a rhythm that our brains appreciate. Writing reads well when it's paced well (p. xiv).

Having defined pacing, Leograndis proceeds to lay a framework for teaching pacing. According to Leograndis, pacing is the concept that ties all other aspects of writing together. *Fluent Writing* is divided into two parts. Part 1: Toward Building an Understanding defines and expands on the meaning of pacing, then discusses Leograndis' philosophy of teaching this skill. Part 2: Teaching Pacing provides examples of pacing lessons for use with students.

This is not a book for those writing teachers in love with their own red pens. While acknowledging the importance of grammar, and emphasizing its role in effective communication, Leograndis nonetheless insists that there is a place for sentence fragments and other supposed no-no's of which the writing curriculum long consisted. What is important is that the student makes the "mistake" intentionally and for a purpose.

*Fluent Writing* holds a unique place among "how to" writing books; this reviewer found no other books with this precise topic of pacing. An important addition to the writing curriculum, this book is a must read for all teachers concerned with teaching their students to write what others will want to read.

**Reviewed by Chris Cicchetti, Education Librarian, University Library, University of La Verne, California**

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**Magner, Laura (2005) *Researching Adventures: Challenging GLYPH-Making Activities*. Marion, IL: Pieces of Learning.**

**Pages: 80 Price: \$12.95 ISBN: 1-931334-43-9**

I had hopeful expectations for Laura Magner's *Researching Activities: Challenging GLYPH-Making Activities* because of my personal interest in student-centered learning activities. I was curious about the instructional strategy of GLYPHs as a means for teaching research skills. Therefore, it is with a great deal of disappointment that I find myself not recommending this teacher resource.

The structure of the book begins with an introduction to GLYPH, an activity that involves gathering information and then results in completing a picture. In addition, Magner includes the science, math, social studies, and language arts national objectives that are the basis for her individual student activity sheets. The bulk of the book contains teacher and student directions for different types of GLYPHs with accompanying examples. The final section of the book includes practice in using different types of research resources (i.e. an almanac and an encyclopedia). At face value, the structure is promising for providing teachers with a solid way to introduce students to the research process. However, a closer look at the details proves otherwise.

From a writing standpoint, *Researching Activities* needs a better copy editor. Throughout the teacher instructions, numerous examples of incorrect grammar and punctuation usage can be found. For example, pages 17 and 18 ("Cereal GLYPH") use commas improperly with a comma in place of a period for end punctuation and a comma missing from a series of items in one sentence. On page 32, there is a random use of hyphens and equal signs within sentences, and the phrase "and even" should actually be "an even." Even more troubling, on page 38, a student handout, the word "realistically" is hyphenated improperly. In addition to these types of errors, the student activity sheet "Atlas Practice" on pages 76 and 77 has an out of order numbering sequence. The items are numbered 1, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 2, and 3. I believe students would find this confusing.

Within the student activity sheets, more concerns arise. The book is designed for elementary level students; however, the word choice may prove to be awkward. On page 18, students are directed to "Attach [a piece of

paper] to the NW corner of the front of the box” and are told “The cereal is shaped like small orbs” and to “Add a pewter-colored spoon.” On page 62 students are instructed to “Depict this material in your drawing.” Unfortunately, “depict” is an eleventh grade level word. Also, I am not sure the directions are easy enough for students to understand. A teacher using one of these activities will need to plan on a very intensive lesson of helping students. Finally, the individual GLYPH activities are not always thematic in nature. Students are directed to find the dimensions for different parts of a GLYPH through research. For example, on page 40 (“Computer GLYPH”), Step 2 reads: “To find length and width [of a piece of paper], divide the number of stories in the Sears Tower by 4. Use this number in centimeters.” This same activity sheet includes Step 4 “Place three lines of binary code on the monitor screen” and Step 6 “If hurricane force winds are stronger than gale force winds, color the escape key red. If gale force winds are stronger than a hurricane’s winds, color the escape key green.” Students do receive practice in research, but they collect random pieces of information.

From an aesthetic perspective, the sample artwork hinders rather than helps the book. Magner includes an example of what each type of GLYPH should look like when completed. It is unfortunate that she did not search for either an artist or computer generated images. Even samples of actual student work would have been appealing.

Anyone interested in purchasing and using *Researching Activities* should be prepared to read through the student activity sheets to identify and correct grammatical and punctuation errors. In addition, this person should be prepared to work closely with the students, as they will need assistance. I advise potential consumers to think carefully before selecting this teacher resource.

**Reviewed by Julie Malcolm, UNC Greensboro, Doctoral candidate, Curriculum and Instruction.**

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**Matteson, David M. & Freeman, Deborah K. (2006). *Assessing and Teaching Beginning Readers: A Picture is Worth 1000 Words*. Katonah, NY: Richard C. Owen Publishers.**

**Pages: 138 Price: \$18.95 ISBN: 1-57274-862-1**

*Assessing and Teaching Beginning Readers (ATBR)* clearly demonstrates that the divide between today’s reading instruction specialists, as to how this tuition should be conducted, remains highly visible. This dispute can be separated by its two distinctly different points of view.

One of these perspectives is that direct, intensive, systematic, early, and comprehensive (DISEC) tutelage of a predetermined hierarchy of discrete phonics skills and knowledge is the most time- and cost-effective manner in which to teach novice readers how to accurately recognize written words. There is much empirical data to support this contention.

The second of these precepts is defended in *ATBR*. It argues in favor of the unique principles and novel practices of the Whole Language (more recently called the Balanced Reading) approach to beginning reading tuition. A great deal of qualitative evidence is available as confirmation of this opinion.

The References section of *ATRB* is filled with citations to the publications of well-known members of the Whole Language (WL) movement. The seemingly single notation out of keeping here is the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000). The only WL advocate on this panel denounced its findings on the basis that WL reading pedagogy is confirmed by relevant non-empirical findings.

Examples of the WL view on teaching young pupils to read are found early on in this book. Its Preface avers that youngsters’ attention to picture detail in books builds the strong foundation for a child’s later literacy experiences in learning to read. Later in its pages, *ATBR* maintains that the competent first-grade teacher “understands that if young students spend all of their time reading just the words” in books, “they may miss the deeper meaning of stories” (p. 83).

Reading instruction authorities who support DISEC reading pedagogy protest that relevant empirical findings do not confirm these and other basic claims about WL instruction. Children’s use of pictures in books to tell stories is not an empirically verified use of the time available to develop students’ written word recognition skills, negative critics of WL observe. Reading teachers thus are cautioned that children’s attention to picture detail in books is not essential for success in beginning reading development, the WL and *ATBR*’s claims to the contrary, notwithstanding

There are other important distinctions between the DISEC and the *ATBR* modes of early reading tuition. For example, the latter promotes the idea that the process of reading for very young children is similar to playing. This belief leads *ATBR* to propose that it is the young “child’s ability to comprehend [written text], and *not* a child’s attention to letters, [speech] sounds, and words, that is the foundation for his/her reading” acquisition (p. 3).



As a substantiation for that conclusion, *ATBR* highlights a teacher instructing a class of children how to learn to read the upper-case version of the word, HUG. This is done by having pupils look at the pictures in a book, about half of whose pages present only the single word, HUG. At no time in this lesson are children taught to recognize HUG by applying phonics information for this purpose. *ATBR* explains that its endorsement of this kind of written word recognition instruction is based on the maxim that if young students spend all of their time reading just the words in texts they may miss the deeper meaning of stories.

In that regard, it is held by *ATBR* that "reading is about *making meaning*, not just reading words" correctly (p. 83). How the former goal can be met before the latter aim is attained, however, is not clearly revealed by *ATBR*. Moreover, the word decoding (i.e. the attaching of speech sounds to letters in a word, then blending together the phonemes so generated, so as to produce an approximate pronunciation of the word), does not appear until page 87 in *ATBR*. Even at this advanced stage in the book, no distinctive definition of decoding, nor how to teach it, is provided. That *ATBR* attributes only a minor role to phonics development in beginning reading teaching is unquestionable.

There are several other marked dissimilarities between *ATBR*'s conceptualization of how beginning readers best learn to read and the one voiced by supporters of DISEC pedagogy. However, at times the two parties do express noticeable agreements. For example, the two groups concur that a classroom literacy center is essential for children's immediate access to literature. *ATBR*'s emphases on the need for talking with children about stories in books, and for special preparation of children before they attempt to read informational texts, are shared by advocates of DISEC reading tuition.

Proponents of DISEC reading tuition also would agree, in principle, with *ATBR* as to the interrelatedness of students' reading and writing. However, the terms, *handwriting*, and *spelling* do not appear in *ATBR*'s index. Conspicuously missing from the book is any mention of instruction to young children as to how to handwrite legibly and spell correctly. Although *ATBR* stresses its belief that children's writing supports the same components found in reading, expecting children to "read" the illegible spellings that they produce seems to negate this assertion.

The final two (out of nine) chapters of *ATBR* offer directions to teachers on how to (1) assess children's literacy development; and (2) analyze the data that thereby is collected. In order to gain the top level of proficiency in item (1) a child has to "show attention to story details, and notice some print" (p. xi) on pages of a story. Also, a student must demonstrate his/her ability "to follow" text that is read aloud, and "know some sound/symbol relationships." Finally, he/she has to be deemed "able to tell a story" about a book "with little or no teacher support" (p. 101).

As for item (2), teachers are directed by *ATBR* to record these data into graphs in order to decide which child is making progress, and if the graphs indicate discrepancies between the levels of student work, there are directions for what teachers should do about it. Conspicuously missing from the book are references to standardized tests of children's reading attainment. It thus is apparent that the authors of *ATBR* are convinced objective judgments of students' reading accomplishment are unnecessary.

The majority of the positions taken by *ATBR* on reading instruction and assessment clearly are not endorsed by advocates of the DISEC form of this teaching. However, a 2002 poll of teachers of children conducted by the Manhattan Institute found that most of them believed their instruction must be aimed at the gratification of their students' individual psychological needs, rather than to meet predetermined academic standards. Teachers with that mind-set likely will find *ATBR* a valuable addition to their professional library.

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**Reviewed by Patrick Groff, Professor of Education Emeritus at San Diego State University. He has written over 300 publications in his academic specialty, children's reading development and their literature. He has served on the editorial boards of reading instruction journals and has been a consultant to school districts, the NW and SW Regional Educational Laboratories, and the U.S. Departments of Education and of Justice.**

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**Mathews, Sandra K. (2006). *Between Breaths: A Teacher in the Alaskan Bush*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.**

**Pages: 264 Price: \$18.95 ISBN: 0-8263-3877-1**

Donna McGladrey's unruly students want to learn music, but they have no instruments. Dillingham School in remote Southwestern Alaska in 1958 doesn't even provide its first music instructor with sheet music, but by year's end the twenty-three year old teacher-adventuress has molded her students of Tlingit, Filipino, Japanese, and Norwegian heritage into a competent band (p.57). The lively biography, *Between Breaths: A Teacher in the Alaskan Bush*, explains how McGladrey meets this challenge. It will inspire teachers in culturally unfamiliar or poverty-stricken settings as well as those of us who struggle for the hearts and minds of students who lack family guidance or support.

Donna McGladrey was author Sandra K. Mathews' aunt. While sorting through her late grandmother's things, Mathews came across the many richly detailed letters McGladrey had written to her parents, one of which read, "Please save my letters, . . . I want to write a book someday about my experiences in Alaska" (p. 7). Dr. Mathews, Associate Professor of History at Nebraska Wesleyan University, has published on Native American legal issues, water rights, and women of the North American plains, and was thus well-equipped to fashion from those letters—and from many other sources—the book that McGladrey never lived to write.

Though painstakingly researched, the biography reads with memoir-like ease. McGladrey's Methodist minister father and church organist mother raise their three daughters during the 1930s and '40s on a meager income in a series of cramped parsonages in Minnesota and Illinois, scrimping to provide music lessons. After McGladrey grows up and earns a B.A. in music, she teaches for a year at an affluent school near Chicago, learns to hate schoolteacher infighting, and yearns for a different kind of challenge. Meanwhile, her parents take a long-saved-for vacation in Alaska and write her about the stunning scenery. McGladrey wires the Alaska Territory Education Commissioner, who immediately offers her a job. In September, 1958, she flies to Anchorage and then by bush plane three hundred fifty miles west to the fishing village of Dillingham.

McGladrey soon discovers that the Alaskan "frontier," as she calls Dillingham in letters home to her parents, is gorgeous but lacks a sewage system and teacher housing. She has to room with a bossy veteran teacher in a dilapidated, badly heated hotel for the first few weeks and haul water from the town well until the pair finds better lodging. But living conditions and her consequent frequent illnesses hardly compare to the cultural challenges. The author has filled in skillfully-researched details on the economic, ethnic, and educational history of the region, which resulted in the situation McGladrey faces, of villagers whose seasonal cannery work, supplemented by fishing, hunting, and trapping, leaves them with little energy or funds to support their children's schooling. McGladrey writes home about the villagers' pitiful cabins with no electricity, the drunken fights and child abuse, the discarded oil drums scattered everywhere.

To succeed in her job of teaching music to grades four through twelve and starting a band, McGladrey has to understand and rally the whole community of about seven hundred. She raises funds for instruments and teaches students to play them, works with several church choirs, and organizes concerts. She has to learn how to discipline while encouraging students whose parents have little control over them. By dint of sixteen-hour days, McGladrey succeeds in organizing a splendid spring program, but ultimately burns out on Dillingham.

She moves to Chugiak, near the city amenities of Anchorage, to teach the following fall. During Christmas break a suitor invites her to fly with him to visit Dillingham, but early darkness, a storm, and his piloting inexperience intervene. Tragically, they never arrive. The book concludes by describing the massive search efforts for the downed plane and its occupants' remains.

Although *Between Breaths* is a work of social history whose purpose is to add to the literature on American single women facing frontier-like challenges, it is quite relevant to today's teachers who face situations similar to McGladrey's in remote or depressed American contexts or who venture to teach in third world countries. The book details the toughness, dedication, cultural sensitivity and understanding of poverty necessary to succeed in challenging teaching environments. It also implies the need to make friends and allies quickly, to respect children and to keep faith in the human spirit. Most importantly, the book inspires by portraying the deep, intangible rewards of giving a calling one's all.

Dr. Mathews displays her biographical craft at its best by utilizing, in addition to McGladrey's numerous letters home, interviews of her surviving family members, Alaska acquaintances and students, archival materials which include photography, newspaper, church, music and aviation collections, and research visits to Alaska. A bibliographic essay detailing the author's use of these materials, numerous citations, and several appendices with primary sources attest to the thorough and scholarly nature of the research.

Because the author has embedded the results of her meticulous research in such a lively rendering of McGladrey's life, the reader gains a wealth of accurate detail which colors rather than bogs down the story. This detail, however, becomes tedious in the final three chapters, which describe the circumstances of the plane crash and subsequent search. Unless an educator is also keen on search-and-rescue, these chapters only warrant skimming. On the other hand, the descriptions of McGladrey's teaching experience and social observations in Chugiak are comparatively sketchy; her letters apparently dwelt more on extracurricular adventures in the bush by boat and plane. But even the most dedicated teacher needs some fun times.

Donna McGladrey's example demonstrates how to teach children by committing wholeheartedly to their entire community. Her story provides encouragement for anyone who teaches or wants to teach in a tough place like the 1950s Alaskan bush, as well as reflection for those who already have and enjoyment for lovers of women's history and armchair adventurers.

**Reviewed by Lucy DuPertuis, Ph.D., who has taught in West Africa, Guam, and Yap. She currently teaches expository writing at the University of New Mexico, where she is enrolled in a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program.**

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**Popham, W. James (2005) *America's "Failing" Schools: How Parents and Teachers Can Cope With No Child Left Behind*. New York: Routledge.**

**Pages: 157    Price: \$25.00    ISBN: 0-415-95128-3**

W. James Popham is an emeritus professor in the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. Trained in curriculum and instruction, he taught instructional methods for prospective teachers and evaluation and measurement. He currently focuses his work on educational testing and is a nationally recognized expert.

As the title implies, Popham's book is aimed at practitioners and parents and is an attempt in layman's language to explain the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) school evaluation process and some inherent problems that Popham maintains need to be addressed in order to improve the requirements of the statute. His view is that without addressing the problems in the NCLB legislation many schools will mistakenly be identified as "failing." Conversely, he contends that without the appropriate measures, schools who are meeting the testing requirements may not be providing suitable and satisfactory instruction to the student body. Popham is not against accountability. On the contrary, he is for accountability and does not disagree with the intent of NCLB to improve learning in America's schools, just the process.

Popham advocates alterations to the requirements of NCLB legislation. A central theme reiterated throughout the book is that the "defensibility of any evaluation of a school's quality via students' test performance is almost completely dependent on the nature of the test being used" (p. 19). He believes that for tests to be fairly used they must be appropriate and instructionally sensitive in light of the amount and depth of the content to be tested; provide clear descriptions of what is to be tested for students, parents, and teachers; and must assess diagnostic data provided to teachers, students, and parents on student mastery of content standards. He espouses the use of student work samples that are scored by outside evaluators using rubrics, the use of appropriate affective data using anonymous surveys gathering students' attitudes and interests, and non-test academic indicators such as graduation rates, attendance rates, etc. in addition to suitable standardized tests.

In discussing NCLB, the author points out what he considers major flaws in the legislation. The fact that states determine the type of tests to use to measure their content standards along with establishing the difficulty levels and the time it takes to develop new tests coupled with the expectation that all students can pass with proficiency within the timeframe in the bill are unrealistic. Other concerns expressed are the testing of students with severe cognitive deficits and the dilemma for schools with large numbers of student subgroups more likely to be labeled failures.

Popham states that in many instances, state curriculum officials first identified a set of content standards for their state. Then they assessed students' mastery of those state-sanctioned content standards with statewide standards-based tests (either state developed or commercial). He asserts that in many states "instructionally insensitive" tests are then used to measure school progress. One type of tests that Popham identifies as inappropriate is the traditionally constructed achievement tests (i.e., California Achievement Tests, the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills, etc.) which were never intended to be used as a method of evaluating schools but rather to provide teachers and parents with information on a student's relative performance compared to other students. Another set of tests Popham discusses as inapt for NCLB's school evaluation is standards-based tests that fail to measure the full set of content standards on which they are supposedly based. He claims many of these tests rely on far too many standards resulting in sampling rather than testing all. Test result reports to teachers contain little information that would help them with instructional improvement. He contends that the intent of NCLB was to have tests that provided diagnostic information and criticizes the lack of reporting standard-by-standard results for districts, schools, and individual students. Without meaningful results appropriate instructional decisions cannot be made. If the state's content standards set forth the skills and knowledge to be learned, they can be developed into instructionally supportive tests that provide school evaluation accountability information and information to assist teachers in instructional improvement based on the data.

The book's ten chapters and concluding remarks are easy to read and understand covering many topics –

Annual Yearly Progress, School Report Cards and Sanctions, and different measures of assessment – concisely. This book contains relatively complex information about testing and the NCLB legislation, but explains it in simple terms. It also includes a chapter on the recommendations of the Commission on Instructionally Supportive Assessment (of which Popham was a member) as well as a concluding chapter calling on parents and educators to become knowledgeable on the type of test their state uses and includes questions to ask state and local school officials. His belief appears to be that changes should be addressed state by state.

Popham's information in the book would have been enhanced if he had included references for some of the claims he made about state tests. For parents and teachers, a chart of the states and the types of tests being used at the time of the writing of the book would have been helpful. He does include a brief annotated bibliography for those who would like to read and delve into NCLB and high-stakes testing. That said, it is well-written for the intended audience.

**Reviewed by Darlene Bruner, Ed.D., an Associate Professor and Masters' Program Coordinator at the University of South Florida - Tampa. Dr. Bruner has extensive experience as a teacher, school principal and district instructional supervisor. She teaches courses in leadership, law and curriculum. Her research interests concern the work culture of schools, principalship, curriculum, school reform issues and laws relating to accountability.**

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**Willis, Jerry W. & Kim, Seung (2006). *Using Computers in Educational and Psychological Research: Using Information Technologies to Support the Research Process*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.**

**Pages: 263    Price: \$44.95    ISBN: 0-398-07616-2**

In the preface to this book, the authors indicate that prior to writing this book they conducted a search for others who had written about the use of computers in the research process. The search only yielded resources on how to use various popular statistical analysis software packages and how to use word processors to write dissertations. While the literature beyond these two areas is relatively new, given that this book was probably written twelve to twenty-four months prior to its 2006 publication date, it was disappointing that the authors chose to portray the field in this manner.

For example, in 2003 Terry Anderson and Heather Kanuka published *E- research: Methods, strategies, and issues*. Their text, unlike the Willis and Kim book, considered how the Internet could be used as a tool for designing research projects, conducting literature reviews and focusing in particular on collecting data in a technique by technique basis. They also discussed ethical issues associated with using the Internet to conduct research, along with the potential to analyze data and disseminate results using the Internet.

In addition to this more comprehensive resource, there are other resources that the authors should have found, particularly on the topic of the use of qualitative data analysis software – Weitzman in the second edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, published in 2000, discussed a number of different programs and issues around this topic (it should be noted that the chapters on qualitative analysis are two of the more referenced chapters in this book). The authors also indicate that their overall purpose in writing this book is to provide a reference where “some of the material should be skimmed, [while] some should be read more carefully” (p. v). I believe that they do achieve this purpose.

The authors begin by using two well developed cases meant to illustrate many of the examples that are discussed later in the book. The next two chapters discuss how to use some of the more popular online databases and search engines to conduct a review of the literature. Then chapter four describes some electronic tools that can be used for collaborative research projects or when working in research teams.

The next portion of the book considers how computers can be used to manage research data, beginning with a chapter that discusses how data can be organized and secured using information technology. The next two chapters describe how to conduct quantitative data analysis using both spreadsheets and statistical software packages. The first of these two chapters on spreadsheets is a welcome addition to the vast number of resources available for commercial statistical programs. While the authors focus on using *Microsoft Excel*®, the introduction of *Open Office*® (which is noted by the authors) may become a more accessible option for many researchers. These two chapters also begin the authors’ practice of providing step-by-step (or click-by-click) instructions on how to complete these analyses.

The next two data-based chapters deal with qualitative data analysis, beginning with two more cases – the second of which describes how Mulder (1994) used a qualitative software package in combination with a word processor to conduct her analysis. The authors then discuss some of the issues involved in using software packages for qualitative analysis and describe some of the main commercially available packages – all of

which are PC-based programs. It is a little disappointing that the authors do not describe any of the Mac-based programs, such as *HyperRESEARCH*®, *TAMS Analyzer*® or *Transana*®, or any of the freeware software, such as *AnSWR*®, *CDC EZ- Text*® or *Weft QDA*®. It also is disappointing that the authors do not describe how to conduct qualitative data analysis using a word processor, as they did with quantitative analysis and spreadsheets. Recently, Ruona (2005) has provided a useful reference on how to use *Microsoft Word*® to conduct qualitative data analysis.

The final two chapters describe how to use some of the more advanced features of word processors for academic writing and then discuss how to construct effective scholarly presentations. While I have some personal disappointments with this book, I still believe it could be quite useful as a reference that can be pulled off the shelf to provide a good overview or a starting point when one is looking to use computers and other information technologies in the research process.

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**Reviewed by Michael K. Barbour, doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Psychology and Instructional Technology at the University of Georgia. His major research interests focus on rural K-12 students learning in virtual school environments, specifically the differences in student achievement based upon delivery model and urban-rural distinctions and the factors accounting for these differences; components of web-based learning that students find helpful and challenging; characteristics of effectively designed web-based courses; and whether new technologies, particularly those that allow for interaction, in virtual high schools affect how students learn.**



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