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Brief reviews for August 2008

Angelillo, Janet (2008). *Grammar Study: Helping Students Get What Grammar Is and How It Works: Units of Study, Mentor Texts, Curricular Calendars.* New York: Scholastic.

Pages: 128 Price: $17.99 ISBN: 978-0-545-00521-0

It can be challenging to take something as defined as grammar and make it appeal to students; however, Jane Angelillo has brought together numerous tried and true suggestions to help students cultivate joy in understanding the structure of language. Ideas such as real- aloud time and the use of mentor texts can be used to encourage students to become familiar with specific authors and how they use words to present their ideas. Observation charts can be used to provide for reflective sharing and a better understanding of why language is used in a specific way.

What the author presents is not a grammar rule book, but strategies and activities she has found help children become successful readers and writers. She puts learning grammar "in context" and makes it real.

Reviewed by Dr. Kathleen E. Fite, Texas State University - San Marcos

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Boudett, Kathryn Parker & Steele, Jennifer L., Editors (2007) *Data Wise in Action: Stories of Schools Using Data to Improve Teaching and Learning.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Pages: 182 Price: $29.95 ISBN: 978-1-891792-80-9

Education professionals today face difficult challenges in the face of numerous policies designed to enhance student achievement. Relative demerits or merits of those policies aside, one of the bigger obstacles being met is making sense of student achievement data in ways that can help both students and teachers alike. Using data to enrich and inform instructional practices in a way that is supportive to teachers and administrators alike is one platform of the Data Wise project at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education.

The project's staff released a manual in 2005, *Data Wise: A Step- by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning*, which provides readers with the eight-step Data Wise process to organizing a school's data collection and decision-making model. That manual is currently in use in Harvard University Graduate School of EducationÕs Data Wise course series. What was missing from that guide, however, according to the editors of this second book (a companion text to the 2005 book) were real-life stories of schools that used the Data Wise process.

The stories in this volume expand and make explicit the very real range of impediments education professionals can face when confronted with volumes of information and no real system in place to make sense of it. The editors include a comprehensive cross-section of schools from a variety of geographic, cultural, and social areas within the United States. As well as K-12 public schools, these stories include those of a charter school and an alternative school. Each school's story reflects one of the eight steps in the Data Wise process, which are divided further into general phases: Prepare, Inquire, and Act.

The style of discussion here is anecdotal, and very accessible to many levels of interest. The story-telling style mediates the more technical aspects of the discussion, and by the end of the book, readers may find they have learned more than expected; lessons learned by each school can be experienced allegorically by the reader. (The wide range of obstacles each school faces also adds a certain level of drama to the book, which only heightened its appeal for this reader.) *Data Wise in Action* would be great to include in any teacher- or administrator-training, inservice, or professional development program needing school-based models of data-based decision making.

It does seem today that the need to be data-conversant has been put upon teaching professionals in all walks of education, be it special or general education. However, real-life examples of school principals and teachers working together to solve problems using data can often gloss over the nuts-and-bolts part of the discussion. *Data Wise in Action* is an excellent resource text for anyone interested in learning more about the ways in which a range of real data teams met specific challenges to using student achievement data by making changes in the instructional practices, homework policies, peer observations, student record keeping, and collective problem-solving.

Reviewed by Gita Upreti, Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation and School Psychology at the University of Arizona, Tucson.

Brannon, Lilian; Griffin, Sally; Haag, Karen; Iannone, Tony; Urbanski, Cynthia & Woodward, Shana (2008) *Thinking Out Loud On Paper: The Student Daybook As A Tool To Foster Learning.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pages: 152 Price: $18.00 ISBN: 978-0-325-01229-2

> Not to be confused with a daily-planner daybook that organizes time, the student daybook helps organize thoughts—across time, across subject areas. It helps learners build lasting connections between reflection and application, in-school content and out-of-school life, even last week's lesson and this week's. In other words, it's not just a place to jot down ideas, but a place where real learning happens. *Thinking Out Loud on Paper* helps you understand the power of the student daybook and offers ready-to-use lessons to make the most of it (backcover).

The cover tells so very much about this book that it makes one eager to read the contents. Overall the writing style is inviting, easy reading, almost could be mistaken for a "fun" book, however the content is not just for fun. The style leads one to believe that each of the authors is a very dear friend and you are reading a letter or communication written to you personally. This is a book very worthy of a distinctive place in the educator's book collection. The book could be useful to the first-year, novice teacher and to the experienced one who has been in the classroom for many years. It is not assuming yet not condescending and should be acceptable to all. Each of the chapters has first hand advice (connections) from several of the authors. The authors do not always agree on how the daybook should be used or implemented, however, they do provide a glimpse into how they were able to use the daybook successfully.

Each of the chapters in the book addresses the various aspects of the "art of keeping" a daybook. The reviewer truly believes that it is an art to keep a daybook and the quality of the art is in the "eye of the beholder." After reading the book, it is evident that a person's daybook will reflect that person. It may be neat with everything in order or it may bulging with many insertions and even bits and pieces hanging out on the sides. The outward appearance of the book is not really a measure of the quality of the book. The measure of the book is the academic and personal value that it has to the author.

Chapter 1 is "Introducing the Daybook." The Daybook is not something new. It was used as early as the fifth century BC by Protogas who kept records of key concepts and important debates which might have otherwise been lost. In 1986, David Murray gave new life and meaning to the daybook by bringing it to scholars in rhetoric and composition. These authors have come together as the result of being involved the UNC Charlotte Writing Project. Each of the authors is introduced, three write briefly of their personal encounters with the daybook. They are able to bring life and personality to it, making that book of blank pages as inviting as an old friend rather than an intimidating superior.

One of the most difficult aspects about introducing daybooks is making the students understand it is their own book and not a book of what the teacher wants. It is a place to keep their thoughts, dreams and desires. The daybook works because the student is free to be as creative or plain as he/she desires. The authors provide examples of implementation in various levels of formal education and include a list of ideas from a Literacy Coach's perspective.

In the daybook, one might think that the fewer the rules the better and usually this is true. The authors offer a few guidelines for organization which they have found to be almost essential. As the daybook increases in volume it is crucial for the writer to be able to locate his/her writing on a specific topic or thoughts on a particular day. The authors advocate two features in every daybook: a table of contents and pagination/dating. These enable students to readily locate information thus making the daybook much more practical and usable. It is also important that the daybook have identifying information in it. Many students will form a bond or relationship with their daybook and carry it with them much of the day. Sometimes the books are inadvertently left in another classroom, the cafeteria or other places. Thus, the identifying information becomes important. Daybooks are no different from other ideas which teachers begin at the first of the year, only to toss aside as the year progresses. Teachers who model keeping their own daybooks will have more success than those who do not model. Daybooks need to be a part of each and every class if they are to be truly successful.

Just as technology has changed the world in general, it can (if desired) change the daybook. Some students like the feel of a pen and writing, others like the feel of the keyboard. Either way the daybook can be successful. Ideas are provided for establishing a Collage page or homepage with links. This page would be a virtual table of contents enabling the student to quickly access the contents of his/her daybook. The digital daybook may contain graphs, charts, fancy fonts and even Power Point presentations, but it still has the same purpose as the paper daybook. One must remember that making the daybook digital will have some drawbacks as well as advantages. While the digital form may make some tasks easier, it can make others more complex and difficult. The teacher and the students will have a learning curve and it will take time for each to become proficient. Again it is very important that modeling be an integral part of the implementation of the daybook into the curriculum.

Chapter 7 is "Assessing Daybooks: Valuing Process over Product." Some believe that daybooks and grades do not belong in the same conversation, even a simple process such as counting the pages or mass of the daybook to determine the grade. The authors make suggestions such as have the students 1) reflect and do self assessment. 2) select what part or parts of the daybook they wish to have assessed, 3) write much more than will be assessed so they have ample writing from which to select, and 4) develop a focus on their own growth and development as thinkers and writers. Above all the students need to realize that the daybook has a clear and meaningful purpose. The authors provide testimonials from students about the value of the daybook.

For teachers, the authors discuss using daybooks as a form of reflection and an instrument for change. It keeps records of teaching; not just that they taught addition of decimals on April 10th but notes, such as about half of the students had difficulties with place value. The daybook might even have notes, both negative and positive, about what the students did in their efforts to solve the problems. It provides the teacher with information to use in re-teaching or extensions.

This book's short chapters are to the point and very useful to the practicing teacher who might not have the time to invest in scavenging through many books and articles trying to learn ways to improve their own classroom. It is definitely not a "Band-Aid" to be used lightly for a few days but one that deserves an investment of the teacher's time and energy. Daybooks can be an important part of both a student's and a teacher's education. In conclusion, the daybook offers a way to record those intercommunications with one's self which might other wise be lost. Lev Vygotsky would surely be a proponent of the daybook.

Reviewed by Barba Patton, Ed. D., Assistant Professor, University of Houston-Victoria, School of Education and Human Development, Victoria, TX.

City, Elizabeth A. (2008). *Resourceful Leadership: Tradeoffs and Tough Decisions on the Road to School Improvement.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Pages: 192 Price: $49.95(Hardcover) $26.95(Paperback) ISBN: 978-1-891792-87-8(Hardcover) 978-1-891792-86-1(Paperback)

The phrase may be overused, but it is true that change is hard. Or, as Elizabeth A. City states in *Resourceful Leadership*, "The work of change is hard. The work of improvement is harder." Teachers and administrators across the country are finding these statements to be true as they work to improve schools. In her latest book, City highlights one of the greatest hurdles facing those who are responsible for implementing change: the decision-making process. This volume is written for school and district leaders aiming to improve school performance or to transform instructional practices. The author's discussion and examples are grounded in data gathered during a study of two schools in the first year of a radical change, but the points raised and the

conclusions she draws have implications for most any situation.

The book is organized into chapters in which City discusses the decisions that school leaders had to make regarding the use of different school resources. These resources included some that are typically thought of in school reform literature: people, time, and money. In addition, City devotes a chapter to other "resources" that emerged in her study as critical for improvement: vision, hope, trust, ideas, and energy. This chapter is perhaps the most noteworthy contribution to the discussion of resource use, because it pushes readers to broaden their thinking about the resources that are necessary for school reform. She also examines the role of the district in the change process, and encourages the reader to think of the district as a resource for schools. She notes, importantly, that an appropriate relationship between the school and the district is necessary to allow the district to help — rather than hinder — schools in their efforts. The book begins with a substantial review of the research literature that addresses resource use in schools, and closes with a substantive conclusion in which she expertly draws from the earlier discussion to present several usable lessons for the reader.

The author's presentation of what is "known" and what still needs to be learned about resource use is both readable and informative. Although the study examined the implementation of reforms over the course of a school year, she does not present her discussion in a linear fashion. Instead, she arranges it around a framework based on the resources she identified as critical to the schools' reforms. Although a linear presentation may have made for a more compelling story, City's framework allows her to make her points in a clear manner. She supplements her discussion with carefully selected examples from her interviews and observations. Her examples illustrate beautifully the points she is making in her descriptions of the decision-making process and the leaders' use of resources.

My only criticism of the book is what I sense to be an attempt to balance the presentation of research data with the providing of a tool for school leaders. As a research study, the discussion suffers from the absence of a thorough presentation of the data. As a tool, the book is lacking practical suggestions for school improvement. The exceptions to these points are two appendices which seem out of place. The first details the use of resources at the two schools City studied. The second focuses on schedule design. Although the attempt at balance left both approaches lacking, the resulting book has much to offer as a thought-provoking device for school leaders. I would strongly encourage any administrator preparing to implement new reforms to read this book and to consider their plans for addressing the challenges and pitfalls the author presents.

Reviewed by Ronald P. Kos, Jr., currently a music teacher in the Madison Metropolitan School District in Madison, WI. He holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Wisconsin—Madison. His research examines education reform policy implementation and public school music programs.

Esquith, Rafe (2007). *Teach Like Your Hair's on Fire: The Methods and Madness Inside Room 56.* New York: Penquin.

Pages: 243 Price: $24.95(hardcover) $14.00(paperback) ISBN: 9780670038152(hardcover) 9780143112860(paperback)

Teaching provides the stuff of rich memoir, and by now it is a classic tale: teacher has a plan for teaching his students but encounters obstacles such as bureaucracy and a lack of money, teacher then learns important lessons, and, finally, markets his story. Many teachers have written about their classroom triumphs and trials, but Rafe Esquith believes that his continued work as a teacher sets him apart from the teaching autobiography crowd. Esquith's *Teach Like Your Hair's on Fire: The Methods and Madness Inside Room 56* is the much-celebrated guide to teaching students both the basics and beyond—including how to be kind and hardworking citizens. Esquith offers some useful advice, much of it focusing more on an extended immersion in content than on teaching many discrete skills.

Esquith writes in straightforward prose and includes anecdotes about prior students, personal reflections about teaching and learning, and practical advice for teachers. He teaches fifth grade, and much of his teaching advice is directed toward the upper-elementary teacher, although there are useful tidbits about how to interact with students for teachers of almost any grade level or content area. The book is arranged into chapters, most of which are also the titles of songs ("Add it Up," "What a Wonderful World"). There is an epilogue and three appendices. The appendices include a list of recommended films for student viewing, a sample itinerary for a class trip to Washington, D.C. (extensive field trips come highly recommended here), and the playlists for many of the Shakespearean rock musicals that his students put on each year. Most of the chapters offer subheadings and sections with clear, step-by-step methods for how to recreate Esquith's

favorite teaching activities, such as "Five Can't-Miss Art Projects" and "Marcy Cook Tile Problems," which is a description of how to use a math teaching product.

Like most teachers I know, Esquith feels contempt for standardized tests, pacing guides, and basal readers. He values teaching grammar, a love of reading, and Shakespeare. He is perhaps best known for his Shakespeare instruction—he leads an extracurricular student club that produces a full-length Shakespearean play every year. This is one example of his focus on encouraging students to a high quantity of products and time; he also assigns an Essay of the Week and a monthly book report and teaches students to score baseball games. Students in the "Weekend Film Club" can take home sets of questions about the classic movies that they watch, although most of the sample questions provided fall at lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

Among Esquith's inspirations and embedded within his curriculum are Kohlberg's Six Stages of Moral Development. Teaching students to be better people is an admirable goal. However, there are two elements of his practice that jar with Esquith's stated goal of helping kids to reach the highest level of moral development—in his words, having a personal code of behavior and following it (p. 22) — a) his frequent criticisms in this text of other teachers and occasionally even students (he refers to one student as "not the sharpest knife in the drawer" (p. 11)), and b) his practices that seem to encourage a cult following for his students, among them his famous but all- volunteer Shakespeare productions.

This second reservation highlights that intertwined with admission to Esquith's classroom is possible fame: there is a movie about the Hobart Shakespeareans and Esquith mentions his famous connections like Ian McKellen. Other alumni of the class have gone on to prestigious Ivy League colleges. Students (and their parents) must be aware that endearing themselves to this man can open up a world of opportunities. Kohlberg's sixth stage is not just about a personal code of behavior, but also universal ethical principles of justice (Crain, 1985). Although Esquith does state that he helps students find examples of "Level VI thinking" in literary and film characters rather than in their teacher, modeling how to respect colleagues and students (even in his writing, which many students will read) would be expected of any teacher. Esquith provides the reader examples of students whom he believes are operating at the highest level of moral development, including one girl who defended a little boy when he was mugged but who didn't want any credit for it. Such examples seem out of place. We don't really know exactly why students choose to behave in certain ways. This girl may have known her teacher well enough to know what he would read as morally transcendent—in this case, that not taking credit would impress him. Given the potential rewards for pleasing Esquith, his claiming to understand a student' motivation is discomforting. Which is not to say that he should not continue to try to teach students to be moral people.

There is no question that Esquith works very hard. He describes keeping extremely long hours (many of them spent in organizing the Shakespeare play), grading a heavy load of assignments, and planning complicated lessons specifically designed for his underprivileged students, and he writes novels to boot. Who are these students, the ones who come to school at 6:30 in the morning and who perform full- length Shakespearean plays? I believe that they are not the most academically needy students in the school, and nor are they typical of inner-city students. A majority of the students pictured with Esquith on the cover and in the pages of the book appear to be Asian, and although Hobart Boulevard Elementary School is situated near Koreatown in Los Angeles, demographics list the overall school population as 18% Asian and 80% Hispanic. He does not describe working with students who have special needs.

As a former educator of first-generation immigrant students of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, I have seen firsthand the reverence that most Korean parents place on education. Of course parents of other ethnicities highly value education, but I have encountered cultural differences in parents' views about their involvement with teachers and schooling. Esquith's students may be living in poverty, but I will bet that they also have support at home to encourage them to succeed in school. Many of the students at the school are classified as English learners, but of 118 English learners in fifth grade for the 2007-08 school year, 108 speak Spanish, while only 10 speak Korean (http://search.l ausd.k12.ca.us/cgi- bin/fccgi.exe? w3exec=school.profile.content&which=4548).

All students, regardless of income, should have the opportunity to learn challenging material and have inspiring teachers. Rafe Esquith certainly inspires students. New teachers and veteran teachers alike can learn a great deal from his methods, especially about dedication. However, the methods that Esquith espouses should be seen as simply one teacher's tried-and-tested practices and not as a panacea to help all urban students succeed.

References

Crain, W.C. (1985). *Theories of Development*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Pp. 118-136

Reviewed by Janine Davis, University of Virginia.

Geist, Eugene (2009) *Children are Born Mathematicians: Supporting Mathematical Development, Birth to Age 8.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Pages: 416 Price: $65.00 ISBN: 978-0-13-111677-1

The use of student-centered teaching is effective for younger children. However, in many schools teacher-centered strategy is the dominant method of instruction. The author cites several justifications instructors use to be more teacher-centered. Geist also mentions several innovative methods of creating an environment that is compatible with a student-centered teaching strategy.

With respect to mathematics learning, Geist writes about four different groups of children. These are as follows: infants and toddlers (0-24 months), preschool age children (2-4 years), kindergarten and first graders (5-6 years), and second and third graders (7-8 years). For each age group, the author mentions the appropriate mathematical concepts, which are related to geometry and spatial reasoning, measurement, operations, patterns and algebra. Also, the author describes types of seating arrangements that maximize learning, determines the duration of lecturing that matches each group's age level, and describes the effects of the cognitive and physical changes and their relation to children's understanding the mathematical concepts based on Piaget's four stages of developments. For example, toddlers' attention span is about five minutes, while for the first graders it is about 20 minutes; therefore, the amount of time toddlers spend in constructivist learning must be more than that for the first graders. For each age group, the author mentions concepts that children are not ready to learn. For example, toddlers have difficulty understanding subtraction because they lack the ability to do reversibility. Also, for each age group, the author presents several effective lesson plans that teachers can utilize in their classrooms.

Geist writes about two types of diversity among students: the nurture, which is the effect of environment on students, and the nature, which is about the biology of children. The author explains how these diversities (gender, learning styles, home environment) could affect teachers' selection of an appropriate teaching strategy.

Throughout the book, the author provides many mathematical problems based on constructivist learning that involve authentic assessment. Geist believes children are inborn mathematician who are curious to explore and discover, and teachers should use problems that satisfy their students' curiosity. Children can learn mathematical concepts if teachers provide appropriate guidance and act as facilitators. He contrasts this method with the often poor results from traditional teachers who rely on textbooks and worksheets.

I strongly recommend the use of this book for elementary math teachers working with children up to third grade. Teachers need to know the effects of cognitive development on children's learning in order to be effective instructors. Teachers need to know how an effective mathematics classroom environment must be different from a traditional one.

Reviewed by Dr. Hosin Shirvani, College of Education, University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, Texas

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Gray, Jeff (2008) *601 Maple Street.* Louisville, KY: Innovative Press.

Pages: 30 Price: $8.25 ISBN: 978-0-9800547-0-5

At first glance, this book seemed a bit elementary or mundane. The black and white cover, somewhat flimsy paperback format, and limited pagination add to this impression. However, a deeper look reveals that it is both insightful and entertaining. The book causes readers to reminisce about their own experiences, as well as, learn from another person's view of education.

I enjoyed this book because it is similar to Parker Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* (1998), in that the teacher's journal or diary entries appear to be authentic and in content. The journal entries share the feelings, hopes, dreams and frustrations of everyday life for a teacher. It is also similar to Palmer's book in that Gray shares in the journal entries that the teacher, although somewhat reluctantly, does become involved in the personal lives of the students. Palmer discusses in greater depth teachers' real fear of becoming closely involved with students. In *601 Maple Street* the teacher overcomes those fears and creates a learning atmosphere that is wholesome for both teacher and students.

This is a candid, realistic, and fun account of a teacher's journey through the summer vacation season and the beginning of a new school year. Not only are the professional daily activities recounted, but a few personal accounts of the teacher's life are included as well.

This style of writing enables the reader to get to know the author's *own* personality in a brief, but meaningful way. The large print makes it an easy read for the eyes also. Although there is not much text in this little book, what text the author has written is both cogent and beneficial to the reader.

References

Palmer, P. (1998). The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Reviewed by Darcus D. Smith, University of Oklahoma. Darcus Smith is also a Reference Librarian in the Oklahoma City area.

Gray, Jeff (2008) *601 Maple Street.* Louisville, KY: Innovative Press.

Pages: 30 Price: $8.25 ISBN: 978-0-9800547-0-5

First, I'd like to say "well done!" to the author. Jeff Gray has written an unusual book, from the perspective of a young person, as if it is a rudimentary journal as the narrator moves into the profession of a teacher. Nonetheless its content is excellent, and the black and white photographs that precede the written words are excellent — appropriate, complementary, but not too directive. Teachers do need to stop thinking about students as a collectivity, but instead as a collection of individuals, each with his own "baggage," her own interests, needs, abilities, and disabilities. I think that the principal of Gray's teacher gives some sound advice—for this new teacher to go out and visit the students' homes (or lack of same), find out a little bit about them, and then go from there… Make the classroom a place where the students take ownership, and help them establish and keep the rules, according to their vision. Then, and only then, can learning and sharing begin.

All educators, teachers and administrators as well as beginning teachers and student teachers, should read this book. Teaching isn't easy; sometimes it isn't fun; it's heart rendering, and it's about being open enough to want to learn about the students who make up the class. It's not a canned profession, teaching is about caring, and showing people that you care. Like the author says, it's about caring enough that sometimes all you want to do is to cry and to start over again.

Thank you, Jeff Gray for sharing this book with me. Too often teachers close their classroom doors and want to forget about the external environment — the neighbourhoods, homes, and families of their students. I concur with the author that this approach is wrong. Teachers must get out of their classrooms, out of their schools, and into the harsh reality of their students' homes and lives in order to begin to understand the students' needs. Then and only then does real learning begin.

Stephen Covey in 1989 said "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." That principle can and should be adapted by all teachers; seek first to understand your students before you impose your teaching on them.

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Covey, S. R. (1989). The 7 habits of highly effective people: Restoring the character ethic. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Reviewed by Ruth Rees, PhD, Faculty of Education, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

Jensen, Eric (2006 hardcover; 2008 paperback). *Enriching the Brain: How to Maximize Every Learner's Potential.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.

Pages: 330 Price: $24.95(hardcover) $18.95(paperback) ISBN: 978-0-7879-7547-0(hardcover) 978-0-470-22389-5(paperback)

Enriching the Brain: How to Maximize Every Learner's Potential builds a compelling case for how understanding the brain and the development of intelligence can be used to shape practices and to build

policies that enhance educational attainment for all types of learners. Throughout the book, Jensen skillfully builds his case for enrichment by helping his readers understand the fallacies associated with the fixed-brain concept and the importance of growing brain potential at every age and every ability level. As the author of over 20 books and the head of Jensen Learning, Eric Jensen is a recognized authority on equipping educators with a practical way to bring the findings of neuroscience into the classroom.

The book is written in an explanatory format in which the educational implications of brain research can be easily understood and applied by educational practitioners, parents, policy makers and citizens. The book is designed to help the reader understand how environmental factors impact the brain, and how learning outcomes can be enhanced through what Jensen refers to as "coherent contrast."

The book begins by putting to rest many of the myths associated with brain development. Jensen leads the charge with four basic brain principles: 1. All processes are an interaction of mind, emotions, body and spirit; 2. A wide range of factors govern the body and the brain as a system; 3. Genetics alone does not explain human behavior; and 4. A multitude of factors influence the function of the brain (p. 2). As he continues to discuss the myth of the fixed brain, Jensen introduces the term gene expression as an explanation of how the interplay among genes is facilitated by environmental signals. He states that the "genetic blueprint is not a mandate. It is only a part of the picture" (p. 11). He extends this idea through a brief examination of the major theories of how intelligence is measured, leading to the question of whether traditional measurement methods view intelligence as a fixed or variable entity. He provides several examples of longitudinal studies which demonstrate that intelligence can in fact be raised through the process of enrichment.

The text explores the basis for the science of brain enrichment. Jensen proposes seven factors which contribute to enrichment: physical activity, novel meaningful learning, coherent complexity, managed stress levels, social support, good nutrition, and sufficient absorption time (p. 66). The reader is reminded of the plasticity of the brain and that purposeful modification is indeed possible. Jensen gives the reader insight into the developing brain from birth through the tumultuous teen-age years. He explains what is happening in the brain at each age level and how that translates into behaviors. He closes each age-specific discussion with practical suggestions which he refers to as brain maximizers.

As an expansion to the idea that societal factors influence brain development, the author provides an examination of the brains of children who experience challenges posed by disadvantaged circumstances such as poverty or special needs. Poverty is described as a condition that increases the likelihood of many difficult conditions such as exposure to toxins, limited language interchange, single-parent households, high levels of stress, and poor nutrition. There are several examples of effective intervention programs which have demonstrated positive results in helping children and families who are caught in the trap of poverty. Attention is then turned to a discussion of special needs. The following quote frames the discussion which ensues: "Talent is the compatibility between biology and environment, and learning differences only become learning disabilities through specific environments" (p. 131). For instance, if a profession is not heavily dependent upon reading, the presence of dyslexia may not cause a problem in functionality. Different learners are uniquely shaped by the interaction of genetics and environmental influences. Jensen discusses several common cognitive disabilities along with strategies for maximizing learning in each.

In exploring the brains of the gifted, the premise is that the gifted also have a right to an education that assures they reach their academic potential. Jensen's definition of gifted includes those in the top three percent of the IQ range. He points to the work of Joseph Renzulli and the "Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness" which includes above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment as indicators of giftedness (p. 149). Jensen uses the acronym M-O-R-E to help the reader understand the four categories of brain differences in gifted individuals. M-O-R-E represents brain differences in morphology, operations, real estate, and electro-chemical cellular function (p. 154). Jensen reminds the reader that without contrast there is no learning and enrichment for any student. He states that the gifted are the most disadvantaged in the current educational system as a result of the lack of contrast and enrichment provided for them.

In bringing what has been discussed thus far down to the policy level in terms of how schools can become places where over 90 percent of students benefit from enriched learning, practical issues are addressed in a way which helps the reader understand the how-to of making the transition to a school-wide enrichment policy. Jensen paints a picture of what an enriched classroom might look like. Examples of innovative programs help the reader make a connection between ideas and practices. The concepts of knowledge about students, passion for teaching, classroom instruction, assessment and social groupings are related specifically to enriched educational environments. He explains a variety of innovative school-wide solutions ranging from curriculum compacting to pull out and accelerated programs.

Enriching the Brain: How to Maximize Every Learner's Potential, is an inspiration to those who believe in reaching one's potential, and a guidebook to those who want to know how to make it happen. The book

successfully combines factual brain-based information with practical suggestions which can lead the reader towards an understanding of how to use enhanced environments to enrich the brains of all types of learners. The material is presented in a way that can be easily understood and applied by educational practitioners and parents alike. The book stands in the gap between the scientific findings of neuroscience and the practical applications of that knowledge in the classroom or home. The premise that brains can be enriched is solidified throughout the book as readers are lead through a journey of understanding how genetics and the environment can interact to "change the brain for the better" (p. xiv).

Reviewed by Ann B. Watts, Director of Stokes County Operations for Forsyth Technical Community College in North Carolina and currently enrolled in the Educational Specialist program in Higher Education at Appalachian State University.

Johnston, D. Kay (2006). *Education for a Caring Society: Classroom Relationships and Moral Action.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Pages: 124 Price: $24.95 ISBN: 0-80774-718-1

A college professor of courses offered to senior education majors is attending a conference during the scheduled class time. Sticking to the syllabus's calendar, she decides to give the class a test but without a proctor. The results are "painful and long lasting" (p. 1). It is confirmed by the students that some of them took the opportunity to cheat.

This scenario is presented in the book, *Education for a Caring Society: Classroom Relationships and Moral Action* by D. Kay Johnston, Professor of Educational Studies and Women's Studies at Colgate University. Johnston invites readers to consider the classroom relationships that lend themselves to the development of moral actions. In this reading, the idea of moral actions is centered on the morality of relational interaction. Relational interaction is defined by Johnston as encompassing the ideas of both care and justice. Johnston states, "Relational morality urges us to reflect on a situation and to act in a way that maintains connections with people and that treats everyone with fairness" (p. 38).

The need for a teacher to develop relationships with his or her class and individual students is addressed; however, the focus of this book is the relationships students have with each other, and the potential they hold for students' ethical and cognitive growth. Johnston continues, "…if we lose sight of this goal, we lose the possibility that schools present us to influence our students' development, to teach for social justice, and to truly reform the world in which we live" (p. 5).

Believing that education is a moral endeavor in which teachers have a unique responsibility to children, Johnston writes that whether or not teachers consciously realize it, their actions in the classroom tell the students a great deal about personal relationships. Therefore, Johnston suggests that this aspect of schooling should be part of the conversations held at the pre-service and the in-service level of teacher education.

Considering teachers' responsibilities leads to reflective thinking in terms of moral development, and how it has developed over time. Johnston explains the influences on her thinking about moral development by discussing the works of theorists: Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan. Piaget's contribution is the importance of listening to people in order to attempt to understand how they make meaning of the world (p. 8). From Kohlberg, Johnston discusses the idea that changes in thinking can be facilitated by conversations. We can begin to think better, and in more complicated ways, about the moral dilemmas we face. Secondly, Kohlberg places great weight on the idea of thinking impartially; using justice criteria to solve problems. Theorist Gilligan introduces the voice concerned with issues of relationship and how to take care of everyone affected by a dilemma. Gilligan developed a theory that conceives a moral voice of care and a self that connects to others. Johnston's previous studies center on issues of justice and care when discussing moral issues. Here Johnston suggests that teachers teach children to use both justice and care to solve moral problems.

Johnston collected data for the book by interviewing six teachers she has known for over 30 years. A summary of the conversations is introduced in Chapter Three, "Doing Right by Them: The Relational Landscape of Classrooms," and resounds throughout the book. The teachers were asked:

1. Can you describe yourself as a teacher?
2. How have you changed?
3. If you think about teaching, can you describe a moral conflict you have had in the classroom?
4. What would your ideal kind of classroom interaction be?

5. When you think about the relationship you want students to have in your classroom, how would you describe them? Is that a moral consideration for you?

The responses of the teachers to these questions demonstrate their desire to do the "right thing" for their students when meeting their needs.

Stressing an educator's responsibility and opportunity to teach the students acceptable social behavior, Johnston states, "Teachers need to think about teaching, practicing, and modeling the behavior we would like to see our students and even ourselves use in social relationships, both when these relationships feel comfortable and when they are in conflict" (p. 57). Furthermore, people see themselves in two ways: the achieving self and the social self. The achieving self is competitive in relationships while the social self is the connection of self with others. This social self of student-student relationship is the focus when, in the last chapter of the book "Expanding Our Ideas of Relationship" Johnston offers three things that students of any age must learn about the dimensions of relationships and the role one plays:

1. How to pay attention to the language of the relationship in which we are all embedded.
2. How to listen to and imagine the other.
3. How to pay just attention to the other.

The book ends with a discussion of a classroom being a community. The community evolves as each member acknowledges that relationships are necessary and this acknowledgment opens the concept of responsibility in the relationship. Realizing we are a part of the community and seeing ourselves in the community gives us a place to self question: what are the affects of my actions on the people in this community? Seeing the relationship of oneself with others and the responsibility that one has to others in the classroom is the beginning of internalizing and changing the way we think about ourselves in the world.

The strong point of the book is the challenge that Johnston gives teachers to begin having conversations with their colleagues and students about student-student relationships and their connection to moral action. This is also emphasized in *The Book of Learning and Forgetting* by Frank Smith who draws a parallel with Johnston in the discussion of the relationship of one's learning connecting with the company in which one belongs. Smith writes that the connections develop through more "opportunities in schools for respect, collaboration, reflective thinking, individual initiative, wide experiences and personal interaction (1998, p 91). Smith and Johnston seem associated in their thinking as Smith continues to state that these relational connections can be accomplished by understanding, effort, and honesty.

The strengths of the book throw light on its weaknesses. Mention is made of the need for pre-service and in-service education for teachers in the area of classroom relationship building. However, the book does not offer suggestions on how to meet these needs. Ideas and concepts are shared, but the reader is left wondering how to begin to help students realize that they are part of the world in general and their classroom in particular. Specific lessons and/or instructional strategies would not only be helpful, but might increase the probability of implementation.

Johnston's passionate writing which concentrates on the impact of moral action in student-student relationships in the classroom is moving. This short book is a recommended read. Those who aspire to teach will realize their responsibilities, and those who are career teachers will be challenged to rethink their daily experiences. All readers will see relationships and the development of moral action as more than meets the eye.

References

Smith, F. (1998). *The book of learning and forgetting.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Reviewed by Kimberly Giaudrone Haney, a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, in the department of Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum. Ms. Haney is interested in the classroom relationship.

Kluth, Paula & Schwarz, Patrick (2008) *Just Give Him the Whale!: 20 Ways to Use Fascinations, Areas of Expertise and Strengths to Support Students with Autism..* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Pages: 143 Price: $19.95 ISBN: 978-1557669605

People with autism and Asperger Syndrome commonly have special interest areas which may be all-

consuming in time and attention. Some observers of these intense interests may judge them to be deficits or compulsions in need of interruption and others may perceive them to be strengths and areas of expertise (Winter-Messiers, 2007). The premise of *Just Give Him the Whale!* is that students with autism and Asperger Syndrome will likely do better in inclusive elementary- secondary classrooms if their special interests areas and fascinations are valued, viewed as strengths, and integrated into the learning environment. Students may be calmer, experience better self-esteem and confidence, have improved social relationships, and be open to learning about other things if their core interests are supported (Winter- Messiers, 2007).

In *Just Give Him the Whale!*, Paula Kluth and Patrick Schwarz advocate for teachers to learn about student interests and then develop assignments and classroom activities related to those interest areas. They then offer details of how to apply this approach with specific, practical examples. Although this may be especially relevant to students with autism, it also clearly benefits a wide range of students. Kluth and Schwarz are consultants and educators with background in special education, inclusion, and disability services and rights.

The authors offer numerous examples of how teachers can use these strategies. As suggested by the title, a student's interest area might be whales and thus assignments might relate to reading about whales, writing about whales, drawing whales, making maps about where whales live, counting whales, etc. Instead of attempting to block the interest in whales, that fascination is supported and then as possible expanded, for example, to include other sea animals. Chapter topics include using interests and fascinations to help the student expand social skills, be comforted, improve literacy, connect to standards- based content, think about future career ideas, learn mathematics skills, and make sense of the world.

The primary strength of the book is the focus on practical curriculum and learning activities described in the context of the interests and fascinations of people with autism. Another helpful feature is the Frequently Asked Questions Appendix in which the authors respond to common questions about their approach. Some believe that "teaching to passions" means "giving in" to students and that the intense interests need to be blocked or limited or allowed only as rewards for good behaviors (Kluth & Schwarz, p. 126). The authors' reply illustrates the shift to a strengths based perspective.

The current interest in autism is high. As a readable and practical guidebook the book is recommended for academic and public libraries. Teachers and pre-service teachers are the primary audience but parents and others interested in topics related to autism may also appreciate it.

References

Winter-Messiers, M. (2007). From tarantulas to toilet brushes: Understanding the special interest areas of children and youth with Asperger Syndrome. *Remedial and Special Education, 28*(3), 140- 152.

Reviewed by Laurel Haycock, University of Minnesota Libraries.

Rothstein-Fisch, Carrie & Trumbull, Elise (2008). *Managing Diverse Classrooms: How to Build on Students Cultural Strengths.* Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Pages: 176 Price: $25.95 ISBN: 978-1-4166-0624-6

Carrie Rothstein-Fisch and Elise Trumbull give readers definitive resources covering, specifically, cultural values and beliefs in diverse classrooms. Their purpose in writing this book was to build awareness and understanding of cultural diversity in order to effectively organize and manage their classrooms. *Managing Diverse Classrooms: How to Build on Students' Cultural Strengths* is divided into seven chapters and a conclusion. Beginning with classroom management, the book progresses through group orientation, support from families and teachers, classroom rewards, students' motivation, learning in the content areas, assessments and a conclusion which leads to some questions for future research. The authors present readers a different perspective on cultural rules in diverse classrooms.

The authors introduce the idea of raising students' cultural strengths with classroom organization and management by utilizing a new approach, the bridging cultures approach. They argue that cultural dissonance between schools and homes may affect students' learning, performance and communication in classrooms. Teachers must understand the significant features of two types of cultural orientation-- individualistic and collectivistic--in order to understand students' cultural values. Students from collectivistic cultures may not wish to formulate or share their ideas and thoughts because they have been taught to respect elders and others who are more knowledgeable than they are. In addition, they tend to be interdependent, maintain adherence to their families and emphasize group success. On the other hand, students who are from

individualistic cultures do not think self- expression is a sign of disrespect. These latter students tend to be independent, make personal decisions on their own, and emphasize individual achievement.

The authors explain the differences between collectivistic and individualistic frameworks which may lead to conflict between schools and home. When Latino immigrant parents come to school conferences, they will ask teachers, "How is my son/daughter behaving?" "A teacher may find it difficult to stifle her consternation after hearing the same question from 25 or 30 sets of parents" (p. 14). Parents may care more about their children's behavior at school, whereas the teacher's goal is to discuss children's academic progress. An understanding of these two different orientations would help teachers eliminate stereotypes, see beneath the surface and discover the behaviors different cultural students expect. Teachers should open their minds to reexamine their goals and their roles in the teaching process.

Secondly, the authors try to make readers understand the huge influence that parents' involvement in school activities has for their children's academic development. They explain to readers that through the Bridge Culture Project, teachers are able to maintain close relationships with parents and students, foster interest in parents' cultures and build up two-way communication from open houses, parent meetings, and parent-teacher conferences. In addition, it is teachers' responsibility to help culturally diverse parents develop their understanding and awareness based on U.S. mainstream culture, the conflicts between two ethnic groups, homes and schools and the foundational educational policies and educational law. Understanding the school systems and school cultures will help parents promote their interests in becoming involved in school activities and helping their children build a dual cultural perspective and have the ability to function well in two cultures.

Rothstein-Fisch and Trumbull have produced an informative, readable book. Their examples of classroom activities are timely and useful.

Review by Yu-Lin Feng, a doctoral student in the Ed.D. program in bilingual education at Texas A&M University, Kingsville. Feng's interests are in teacher education, student assessment and multicultural education.

Salazar, Pamela S. (2008). *High-Impact Leadership for High Impact Schools: The Actions That Matter the Most.* Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Pages: 115 Price: $29.95 ISBN: 9781596670761

Pamela Salazar has written a concise, insightful guide that should be the well-used, tattered and marked-up book that educational leaders refer to for a pick-me-up, reminder, re-orientation and refresher about why we do what we do. Richard A. Flanary, Director of Professional Development Services for the National Association of Secondary School Principals, writes in the forward that we should use this book as a GPS guide on the most effective route to creating a high performing school. (p. vii) Everything that Salazar writes is what we already know to do, but she has done a beautiful job of bringing it together into a framework for action.

Effective schools are led by effective principals and schools that make a high-impact on student growth and achievement are led by higher- impact principals. We know that teacher instruction has the most effect on student achievement but the quality of teachers is dependent on the effectiveness of principals because the principals select, train, support, develop, evaluate and create the culture for teachers. Salazar notes that nearly 25% of the in-school factors that affect student achievement can be directly attributed to the quality and effectiveness of the principal.

Salazar outlines five areas for action that have a high impact on student outcomes and school success. These five areas that focus on purpose, people and process are 1) it's about the mission, not the mission statement; 2) high expectations for each and every student; 3) building communities of learners; 4) teachers are the silver bullet (competent, caring and qualified teachers); and 5) creating a coherent system for continuous improvement. Each chapter of the book begins with guiding questions, and contains a self-assessment tool and reflection and action questions for next steps. The areas of action describe an orderly sequence of activities and processes based on principles and methods formed from over 30 years of research.

I highly recommend the book. I highlighted and referred back to the text numerous times in developing and analyzing policy for education leaders. Every principal and superintendent should read the book before school starts in the fall and then re-read the book every summer to remind them of what needs to be done so that every school is a high- impact school. Salazar writes: "We have the power to change things — but the key to that power is the belief that it exists. This is the core to success in high-impact schools." (p. 110).

Reviewed by Lee Ann Dumas, a director in the Division of Educator Initiatives and Performance for the Texas Education Agency. She serves on the Texas Education Leadership Council and directs the Texas Principal Excellence Program.

Sapon-Shevin, Mara (2007) *Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Pages: 250 Price: $16.00 ISBN: 978-0-8070-3280-0

What happens in a society when people are sorted according to some social construction of who is "normal" and who is not, and those who fail to stack up against such socially constructed measures are excluded? Who is harmed by such a system—those who have been excluded, or those who have been denied the gift of knowing exceptional human beings?

In the book, *Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms*, Mara Sapon-Shevin convincingly argues that inclusive schooling is about much more than providing special-education students with an appropriate placement—it's about teaching all students important lessons on democracy and creating a society in which differences are valued. The project of this book is to counter myths about the inclusion of special education students in regular education classrooms. At the heart of this book is an argument for schooling as a mechanism of social change.

In this book, Sapon-Shevin seeks to convince teachers, parents, administrators, and policy makers that inclusion is not just about allowing students with special needs into a regular education classroom, but it is a gift given to all students and teachers, as well as society at large. She challenges myths about what inclusion is (or is not), by introducing her readers to schools, classrooms, and students for whom inclusion has provided powerful learning opportunities. For example, Sapon-Shevin introduces readers to Micah, a 21-year-old college student who was labeled in early childhood as having a cognitive disability, but was included in regular-education classrooms from early elementary school through college. Much of Micah's case is told in his own words. He stated, "I think self- advocacy is really important, because if you don't advocate you don't get what you want. The way I self-advocate is by telling people what I want and what I need."

Sapon-Shevin also lets the reader hear from friends of Micah's who were regular education students in his classes. One said, "I have always felt if we are to hide the real world events and situations that many kids growing up experience from Micah, are we really doing something good?...Most likely if and when I get married, Micah will be standing up there with me." (ellipses in original). Another friend stated, "I no longer see the world the way I used to see it. No more "cool kids & weirdoes" or "jocks & dorks". No more "retards." Micah, his family and his circle have taught me to view and accept people as individuals without classifications. Just because someone stutters doesn't mean they aren't worthy of conversation." Another of Micah's classmates wrote, "This might sound strange, but I believe that when kids with disabilities are not included and actively participating in school, "general-ed students" never learn how to develop relationships with them. You get a very narrow picture of who they are."

In order to argue her case, Sapon-Shevin has organized this book into three parts. In Part One she seeks to provide readers with a new vision of education that is cooperative instead of competitive, and that intentionally meets the needs of all learners in one, thoughtfully designed classroom. In Part Two, Sapon-Shevin focuses on naming the arguments people use against inclusion and countering those arguments with theory, anecdotes, and a history of how the current system came to be. Between Parts Two and Three, she presents the case of Micah as an interlude to illustrate the claims that she had made in the first two parts. Finally, Part Three includes some of the nuts-and bolts of making inclusion work for all students.

Sapon-Shevin speaks from the viewpoint of a special educator and teacher educator who is committed to diversity and social justice. Her argument is likely to challenge many people who think about disabilities as problems to be fixed and people with disabilities as requiring shelter from the storm of regular education classrooms. At the same time, this book provides much food for thought for those of us who identify as inclusive educators and focus on building collaborative classrooms.

Reviewed by Joy A. Oslund, Michigan State University.

Scharer, Patricia L. & Pinnell, Gay Su (2008) *Guiding K-3 Writers to Independence: The New Essentials.* New York: Scholastic.

Pages: 288 Price: $27.99 ISBN: 0-439-88449-7

Guiding K-3 Writers to Independence: The New Essentials is organized around four central themes of writing the authors have observed over the last 25 years of teaching and researching primary writing. These themes include the assumption that all children and adults can and should write, that oral language plays an important role in linking thought processes with print, that writing takes place across a range of contexts, and that teachers are expert decision makers noticing and supporting their students' individual writing needs.

First, the authors illustrate the theme that all children and adults can and should write by describing the writing activities occurring in kindergarten through third grade classrooms. The classrooms selected participate in writing workshop in which teachers model writing strategies through their own writing and that of other published authors. Over time students begin to borrow strategies from these mentor texts to use in their own writing. This book stresses the need to focus students' writing on their own lived experiences. "Across emergent, early, and transitional writers there is power in writing personal stories from life. When writers have lived what they are writing, they can more easily fill in details and get deeper emotionally" (p. 45). As students begin to realize that they can write about topics of ordinary life, they begin to view themselves as real writers.

Another central theme of *Guiding K-3 Writers to Independence* is that oral language plays an important role in linking thought processes with print. Through conversations during read-alouds, shared reading, interactive writing, and shared writing students and teachers build a community of writers. During discussions students' attention is focused on the phonological, syntactic, and semantic systems of the written language. Students learn strategies and skills such as decoding, vocabulary, voice, purpose, and text structure. The authors believe "speaking and listening are crucial for rehearsing our lives as writers" (p. 92). Through conversation students question and borrow strategies used by their learning community as they become more successful independent writers.

The third theme of this book focuses on the importance of connecting reading and writing across a range of contexts. The authors believe that mentor texts and KEEP BOOKS should be used as an avenue into beginning writing. Mentor texts consist of trade books, instruction manuals, grocery lists, and any other texts written for a purpose. KEEP BOOKS were developed by the Literacy Collaborative and are simple texts that students can take home and practice with family. Through these texts, and discussion surrounding them, students' attention can be drawn to writing conventions such as text structure, choosing the right words, and variety in sentence length. These texts also serve as an example for students' own writing. The authors believe, "surrounding children with quality writing during read-aloud, shared reading, and independent reading provides a rich 'input' of word combinations, writing styles, and interesting ways to communicate with writing that certainly affect their 'output'" (p. 125). The authors provide numerous examples of activities to use with particular mentor texts and KEEP BOOKS to extend writing instruction in the classroom.

The final theme of the book considers teachers as expert decision makers noticing and supporting their students' individual writing needs. Through the use of rubrics and conferencing, teachers should assess student needs throughout the school year. These assessments should serve as a way to inform instruction, not as a means of evaluating for a grade. Once a student's needs are identified, mini lessons using student writing or published texts should be used to extend learning. The authors warn against waiting to teach reluctant readers to write. Reading and writing form a reciprocal relationship which support and inform each other. By examining a reader's needs, an expert teacher will be able to address his or her writing needs as well.

Guiding K-3 Writers to Independence: The New Essentials gives detailed instruction on how to structure interactive writing, shared writing, and writing workshop in any classroom. This book is superior to other professional books on primary writing because it takes these writing contexts and discusses the theoretical reasons, what the authors call themes, why these approaches to writing are so successful. By providing ample examples of student work, classroom dialogue, and photographs of teachers in action the authors give the reader a concrete connection of how to integrate writing into their own classrooms. Each chapter also includes suggestions for ongoing professional development and the appendixes give suggestions of mentor texts to teach different facets of writing. This book would be a great resource for beginning or veteran primary grade writing teachers.

Reviewed by Jennifer Jordan, a doctoral student in literacy studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Jennifer's interests include narrative and expository writing in primary grade classrooms.

Thomas, Alan & Pattison, Harriet (2007) *How Children Learn at Home.* London: Continuum

International Publishing.

Pages: 156 Price: $29.95 ISBN: 978-0-8264-7999-0

Children often amaze adults with their vast knowledge of untaught subjects. From birth onward, children naturally discover great quantities of information through informal and sometimes unintentional means. Often this form of natural, child-initiated learning is replaced by traditional teacher-directed classroom instruction once children reach school age, thus, masking the amount of learning that children are able to do informally. Through their in-depth study of twenty-six home-schooling families adopting an informal approach to learning, Alan Thomas and Harriet Pattison, in their book *How Children Learn at Home*, attempt to shed light on the ways in which school-aged children learn informally.

In synthesizing the existing research on informal learning across the lifespan, most of which focuses on very young children or informal learning by adults in the workplace, Thomas and Pattison find that informal learning occurs in one of three ways: goal-directed learning, incidental learning, and implicit learning. Goal-directed learning takes place when an individual purposefully seeks information or knowledge. Incidental learning occurs when an individual is engaged in an activity, such as play, and incidentally learns something new. Finally, implicit learning takes place at the subconscious level and later comes to the awareness of the individual. Often implicit learning takes place in cultural and behavioral domains but can also occur cognitively. Informally schooled children utilize all three modes of learning.

Thomas and Pattison explain that by informal curriculum they mean something really quite informal in that there actually is no curriculum, teaching, textbooks, requirements, or testing. In fact they contend that "[a]nyone observing this kind of learning may simply feel that nothing of any consequence is happing; there is very little by which progress can be measured, certainly in the short term when the goals and strategies of formal education are no longer in place" (p. 36). Despite the lack of structure, children learning through the informal curriculum are often able to "cover much the same subject matter as formal learning in school" (p. 31).

Because literacy and mathematics comprise such a large place in the traditional school day and lay such an important foundation for subsequent learning, Thomas and Pattison devote separate chapters to reading, writing, and numeracy. The authors reveal some of the parents' concerns with an informal curriculum in the realm of reading. As with many parents of traditionally-schooled children, several home school parents experienced anxiety over their seven-, eight-, and nine- year-olds' reading progress, or lack there of. Several of the parents in the study confessed that they tried to impose more traditional lessons to help bolster their children's reading ability but that the children balked at such methods. Overall, the children in this study acquired reading at a later age than most traditionally schooled children but were much more likely to "thoroughly enjoy reading and read for relaxation, for pleasure, for the excitement of it or even as an obsession" (p. 109).

Although children's writing ability is of grave importance to many teachers, the parents in this study had few concerns about their children's writing competence. As a result, the home schooled children in this study, on a whole, wrote much less than a typical school child. The children's writing tended to be for authentic purposes, though some grew quite passionate about writing and engaged in it for pleasure.

As with writing, children educated under an informal curriculum tend to have a much more authentic understanding of math and are able to learn it as well, if not better, than traditionally schooled children just through everyday living. As one study participant stated, "It's not like working in the physical world according to a curriculum, but with intelligent purpose. It's genuine real-world value. In this way of doing things you can't make a mistake. It's real. If you get the cake mix wrong you have to throw it away" (p. 135). Although many of the children in this study used math solely for practical purposes, several had a greater interest in math and went for advanced study in formal settings.

Though many school officials and teachers would have grave concerns with an informal curriculum and its necessity to leave the acquisition of so many subjects to chance, this study shows that it is a viable and appropriate mode of learning for many children. Although some of the children did not have as broad a subject base as traditionally schooled children, almost all had a very deep understanding of several subjects of personal interest. Further, when the children were ready to enter formal education, they were, for the most part, well-prepared to do so. This book forces the reader to re-examine the teacher-directed learning that takes place in many classrooms and to reconsider the benefits of child-initiated learning and the value of informal play.

Although the authors give general information about how they obtained the participants for this study, primarily through advertisement and solicitation in home-school magazines, home-school organizations, and

home-school meetings, very little information is given about the families. An appendix lists the number, gender, and ages of the children in each family, and the report states that with the exception of the three Australian, three Irish, and one Canadian family all of the participants are British. However, no information is given about the factors that educational researchers and teachers know to be so important: socio-economic status, parental education, parental employment status, race, etc. The reader has no way of knowing if the findings of this study are typical for the average child schooled under an informal curriculum or if the circumstances of these children is in some way unique.

Reviewed by Maria Cahill, doctoral student in literacy studies at the University of Tennessee.

Weaver, Constance with Bush, Jonathan (2008). *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pages: 320 Price: $27.50 ISBN: 978-0-325-00758-8

The first thing that the reader may notice about *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing* is the dry subject matter of the text: grammar instruction. If the reader can get beyond that first impression, he or she will find that the author tries to make the work as appealing as possible, through her use of real-life writing samples and lesson ideas.

Constance Weaver, an award-winning English professor, has written many other "how to" books in the area of grammar instruction. In this newest work, she brings together the latest research about grammar and best practices for teachers and combines it with what she and her colleagues have learned in classrooms over the years. As the title of the book suggests, Weaver goes a little bit further than her earlier works by showing the reader how a clearer understanding of grammatical concepts can result in better, more sophisticated writing.

The book contains a brief review on the major rules of grammar. However, the author emphasizes that the effective instructor must incorporate these rules throughout the writing process, instead of breaking everything into separate units.

Weaver's book is delineated into three parts. First, she covers the latest principles of grammar instruction; then, she examines how to make writing even better by using classroom-proven ideas; finally, she focuses on what other teachers have found useful in the English classroom, including an interesting section on how to teach African- American English speakers to "code-switch" to standard or more formal English patterns.

Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing is suitable for language arts instructors and professionals in the fields of writing and teaching. Given the American context of many of the examples, however, it would be most useful for teachers in the United States.

Reviewed by Mary Shaughnessy who works with student teachers at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.

Wise, Bob (2008). *Raising the Grade: How High School Reform Can Save Our Youth And Our Nation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.

Pages: 235 Price: $24.95 ISBN: 978-0-470-18027-3

Bob Wise channels his abundant political experience to alert parents, teachers, school administration, students, and the U.S. government to the rapid devastation of the nation's public high schools. He argues, "the system has broken down under the strains of trying to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive society and a rapidly changing global economy" (p. 4). Lack of change in education for fifty years fueled the speedy destruction of U.S. public high schools. Dropout rates, lack of secondary literacy, and unsubsidized governmental demands continue to harm secondary education. The damaged public high schools are the umbrella to many consequences of this "insidious silence." The text examines who, what, when, and where of this destruction and concludes with a framework to combat the problem.

Wise reveals the causes of the breakdown in public education through eight chapters in *Raising the Grade*. The blame for America's failing high schools is not centered on one culprit, but a mishmash of government administration and aid, mandatory testing, public school administration, teaching styles and insufficient change. In the first three chapters, Wise discusses overall societal costs such as, lost taxes, increased need for social services, and inadequate productivity from students left behind by the failing system. He discusses

outcomes of demographically and politically disadvantaged students relating the misfortune to secondary education and the disillusionment that public high schools benefit every student. The text provides appropriate and sound evidence supporting the allegations and supplements with personal experiences. The fourth and fifth chapters concentrate on dropout rates and reexamining secondary literacy. Throughout these chapters, Wise paints a clear picture of the consequences if students lack a high school diploma. Student dropouts with weak literacy skills do not become workers for the jobs of "today," especially if they require high school or postsecondary education. However, Wise brings the weakness together in chapter eight and concentrates on successful school strategy for the nation's public high schools.

As a public high school educator, it is difficult to endure criticism about our nation's secondary educational system. However, I admire Mr. Wise for not pointing the finger and blaming just one person or group of people. He realizes that our educational system is "breaking down" with a combination of factors. I am especially thankful for the discussion of mandatory testing, lack of funding and the misuse of the outcomes. He is honest in his assessment and genuinely looks at the facts and data, not political opinion. I think the text provides insight to all involved in altering public education. It is a direct conversation with the reader to face facts and demand educational reform. This text is definitely a starting point to begin a national dialogue to successfully changing public education.

Reviewed by Star Nance, University of Oklahoma.

Wright, Mary C. (2008). *Always at Odds? Creating Alignment between Faculty and Administrative Values.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

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In her introduction, Wright describes the relationship between administrators and faculty within institutions of higher education as having been traditionally one of differing goals, values and perspectives (pp. 1-3). Wright explores the tracks that led educators to this point of disparity, while attempting to disclose any common areas where value paths may converge. The focus is primarily upon research institutions and universities, those institutions that are more science oriented.

Interestingly, Wright's subtitle includes the term alignment when coupling faculty and administrative values rather than agreement. *Webster's II New College Dictionary* defines alignment as "to adjust to produce a proper condition or relationship; to be in correct adjustment"(2001, p. 28) versus agreement which is interpreted as "the acceptance or conceding of something; to be of one opinion" (p. 23). Alignment does not necessitate the categorizing of one party as winning while the other loses. Rather, both parties arrange themselves to move in a common direction progressing toward a unified goal. In the case of higher education, the alignment of values among all participants and stakeholders regarding teaching, research and service is critical for forward movement to occur.

Wright's findings are based upon a grounded theory qualitative study exploring the junior faculty and lead administrators within four departments located in a large research university. Her study included both undergraduate and graduate level departments. Based upon her findings, Wright devised four categories that captured and personified the communication and networking styles of those departments that were thematically identified as: star department, universe department, divided department, and team department. These departmental types were further explored to determine effects upon job outcomes, and more importantly for educators, upon teaching and student learning.

Wright's work is unique due to its dual perspective of both administrator and faculty. Interestingly, she frequently notes the stance of junior faculty which she further describes as often significantly different from that of tenured faculty. Not surprisingly, Wright finds a positive correlation with value alignment on one hand and job performance, institutional continuity, and job satisfaction on the other. These findings have important implications for improving productivity, outcomes, and retention within institutions of higher education.

Wright reduces the idea of value alignment to the lowest common denominator: that of a personal fit with the organization. She coins the term "culture of congruence" (p. 35) to signify this alignment of belief systems. The central component for alignment is the shared understandings of policies and behaviors. More importantly, all participants must share common "interpretive structures" (p. 36), or shared guidelines for everyday practice. Alignment can never occur in the midst of chaos or in situations where opposing views are constantly being jockeyed for position and acceptance. In other words, alignment is a broad concept that starts at a very narrow point. An aligned department consists of aligned individual members, whether they are faculty or administrators. Further, aligned departments boast of productive, satisfied, long-term members

working to promote its common values and beliefs. In an institution of higher education, such a department consists of faculty who are supported in their teaching and research efforts, students who are learning and satisfied with their instruction, and administrators who recognize and embrace their role in enabling both of these outcomes to occur. All components must be advancing in the same direction simultaneously for maximum forward momentum to occur. The misalignment of either faculty or administration can bring progress to a screeching halt resulting in backlash for all stakeholders.

Practical application is evidenced by case study excerpts deposited throughout the chapters. Wright describes the six departments included in her research study, characterizes them according to the four typologies presented in the first chapter, and peppers the dialogue with applicable quotes. The result for the reader is a deeper understanding of the concepts via applied knowledge. Applications for both faculty and administrators are offered. Further, an additional empathy for the other's position may be acquired via an open-minded approach when reading this book. Wright acknowledges that even small, subtle efforts have the potential for creating large effects in departments that cultivate a culture of shared beliefs and aligned values toward the common goal of teaching and learning.

The final chapter is devoted to offering specific strategies for the various players within educational institutions to cultivate an aligned value system characterized by shared beliefs and common teaching and learning goals. However in order for a single department to successfully achieve and maintain alignment, participants outside that department must contribute to the process. It is not enough for the department members only to agree to buy in to the process. Other key players include professional development staff, search committees, faculty support staff and future faculty (i.e., job candidates) also must understand and align to the shared values.

Wright acknowledges that her findings and typology may be very specific for the science-based research institution which she studied. Therefore, she suggests that further research studies targeting other types of institutions of higher education would expand the base of knowledge offered here. She specifically suggests that liberal arts colleges be explored. Further limitations include the departmental confines of her research. Broader applicability such as to entire colleges would be useful.

Wright's work is a valuable contribution due to its dual perspective stemming from both the administrative and faculty viewpoint. A shared understanding by these two bodies may lead to alignment of values and beliefs which may encourage increased productivity, job satisfaction, retention, and learning outcomes. As funding is ultimately tied to outcomes, the entire institution, its community of interest, and all stakeholders stand to benefit from the alignment between faculty and administrative values. Although this publication outlines alignment at the rather modest departmental level, it is implicated that small changes add up to great impacts. Ultimately, alignment between faculty and administrative values begins one individual at a time.

References

Webster's II new college dictionary (3rd ed). (2001). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

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