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Brief reviews for June 2009

Brill, Fred. (2008). *Leading and Learning: Effective School Leadership Through Reflective Storytelling and Inquiry*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Pages: 172 Price: \$19.00 ISBN: 9781571107664

Within the first few paragraphs, readers will find themselves connecting with the author of *Leading and Learning: Effective School Leadership Through Reflective Storytelling and Inquiry*. Brill shares common stories in an uncomplicated way, demonstrating that he understands the role of a school leader. He creates a bridge between university scholars, current research and the reality of school practitioners. The reader will become increasingly more thoughtful and effective as a leader by reflecting on the methods and stories presented in this book.

The chapters discuss the many roles of the principal in-depth: enforcer, system builder, equity promoter, instructional leader, decision maker and even superhero. These profiles represent the many hats that a school leader must wear. School leaders will see a little of themselves in each of the roles. Throughout the book, the author also provides support from big names in the field of leadership.

This book explores how inquiry, ongoing reflection and dialogue can help leaders to successfully play each important role. In order to do this, the author explains that leaders must:

- Frame common problems
- Identify personal and professional values
- Evaluate steps for decision making
- Initiate processes for problem solving
- Increase reflection about leadership practices

The stories within the text present many challenges that school leaders face. It also reminds principals and assistant principals that they are not alone in their struggles. Common dilemmas around decision making, creating consensus and addressing disgruntled teachers, parents and supervisors are shared. While all leaders struggle at some point, the author often paints a bleak picture. Many of the stories do not have a happy ending, which may turn off readers looking for successful examples and positive solutions to current problems.

Questions at the end of each chapter serve as a springboard for discussion. The meaningful questions will benefit aspiring principals as well as those with several years of experience. These prompts for storytelling and reflective questioning can be used for professional growth. In addition, the author explains various processes and protocols to lead administrators in discourse.

Part II presents a variety of tools for school leaders to use. The decision making matrix provides a means for self reflection. Charts, diagrams and other tools in this section provide a resource for school leaders. The author encourages school leaders to use these tools to determine why they make certain decisions and how they may need to adjust their practice.

The book delivers on its goal to inspire change in leadership. It presents an effective tool for problem solving and thinking critically about leadership issues. Overall, the text is a very easy read. The author weaves poignant quotes and stories from leaders in the field. He presents storytelling as a tool for personal and professional development.

The book presents a balance between the stories that leaders tell and the input from the author. While some shared narratives are better than others, each presents something for the reader to reflect on. There is an underlying theme throughout the text, emphasizing the need to pause and reflect on the work that leaders do. The "outtakes" in the afterword provide a nice laugh and a meaningful end to the book.

Harper, Graeme. (Ed.) (2008). *Creative Writing Guidebook*. New York: Continuum.

Pages: 142 Price: \$29.95 ISBN: 0826494293

Creative Writing Guidebook is what the title says. The book is divided into two parts with the first going over various topics chapter by chapter. The second part presents the scope elements as they relate to topics discussed earlier, to suit all forms of writing.

Harper has done excellent work in distilling a broad range of creative writing topics into a rather slim collection in the first nine chapters. The last two chapters of the book highlight the significance of developing appropriate structure, style and given theme to the written product, together with evolving a distinct voice, form and point of view surfacing from the written work.

The chapters are written by practicing academic and/or professional writers who have considerable writing experience in their specialty. The "Introduction" alone is informative and inspiring for any new student of creative writing course-work. Harper lays the emphasis on developing concepts of voice and style, critical understanding and a deeper knowledge about the function of "processing" which is entailed in writing and rewriting until a well-developed piece of written work is ready to be read. Harper recognizes the need for mistakes and revisions necessary to make the writing process worthy of learning and shaping the to-be-written works.

The inter-disciplinary aspect of creative writing is illustrated in all of the chapters as authors compare and contrast the nature and scope of the variety in communication media today, for instance, the trend of screen-to-stage adaptations from novels to short plays and related practices which go into making such transitions possible. The importance of format, structure, back ground context and impact of voice all are discussed at length with examples to show the technical finesse which goes into making creative writing functional. Thus, creative writing is declared as "... an intensely human activity" (p. 2)

Authors whose genre-based workshops are included in this book, do marvelously well in capturing the gist of all key strategies necessary to create a written piece in a specific genre. Simultaneous comparisons between classics and contemporary writers enable the reader to delve into a variety of writing styles together and gain an insight into how time transitions impact poetry, prose, novels or scripts of plays. Nothing is hidden from the reader/learner of the *Creative Writing Guidebook*, because the writers honestly summarize both the successes and the challenges involved in writing, from start to finish.

Appropriate sub-headings and multiple exercises make it immensely useful for the reader to not only absorb the information given at the beginning of the chapters, but also then apply the knowledge gained by working on the exercises presented in the later parts of the chapters. The workshop-based chapters dramatically organize a long list of important elements for each genre of writing, by condensing them into true and tried methods of writing practices, each presented with a sample excerpt or quotes from other works, thus impressing upon the mind of the reader, an original form of ready-made learnt material which can be easily recalled for future reference, while harnessing creative writing skills.

Conventions involved and rules which guide the processes of writing a poem, or a play, a novel, new media or creative non-fiction, are explored in the light of the conscious and subconscious minds of the writers. Writers' block, is considered normal and a necessary process of finding a rich abundance of ideas from the writer's own personal observations or even life experiences. Furthermore, this text also engenders a sense of confidence and freedom in taking the initiative to see what suits the writer best. There is no limit of working and reworking on a work in progress.

Movement, images, senses, memories, unpredictable beginnings, middles and endings (exposition, climax and resolution) are evoked to appeal to the emotional, intellectual and physical perspectives of the readers and can clearly compel an inclined novice or an expert writer to delve into the text of the edited book and learn from it, particularly for the ease with which the text can be followed.

In conclusion, this valuable book can be adopted as a textbook any time by creative writing faculty to share a real wealth of information regarding different creative writing techniques and exercises, and to train the new generation of writers very well.

Reviewed by Saira Qureshi, Adjunct Faculty, Hunter College, CUNY

Kottler, Jeffrey A. & Kottler, Ellen I. (2009). *Students Who Drive You Crazy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Pages: 153 Price: \$25.95 ISBN: 9781412965286

Teachers in any school, in any part of the country will surely identify with the stories that the authors tell in *Students Who Drive You Crazy*. The book presents a very realistic look at the many relationships within schools. The authors look at

issues from all sides and admit that not every strategy works for everyone. By approaching the topic with this attitude, this book provides practical strategies, opportunities for reflection, as well as a bit of comic relief.

The authors approach this topic in a very straightforward manner. They remind us that by choosing the profession of education, we need to realize that children who are difficult come with the territory. Familiar depictions of classrooms, conflicts and children are shared. All teachers will relate to these descriptions.

The book details various profiles of difficult students including those who violate the rules, those who have given up, the perfectionists, those who lack social skills, those who are manipulative, those who withhold communication, those who have impairments, absent, at risk, aggressive and push buttons. Every classroom teacher, counselor and administrator has encountered students that fit into these categories. The authors attempt to describe what hides behind why students do what they do and delve into reasons why they display these challenging behaviors. Dialogue from different student stereotypes is inserted throughout the chapters to provide additional insight.

One chapter is devoted to interventions, strategies and practical techniques to counteract behaviors of students, parents and even colleagues. The authors expand upon the theme of students that drive you crazy, to anyone that drives you crazy. They speak as a voice of experience and reason when dealing with difficult people. They emphasize the building of positive relationships including the development of trust, safety and respect. The authors highlight several steps that are often overlooked:

- framing questions
- setting the stage for support rather than confrontation
- demonstrate active listening

These and other steps are suggested for interacting with teachers and parents as well.

The authors tackle the difficult topic of getting teachers to acknowledge what “gets to them.” They urge teachers to take responsibility for their role in classroom conflicts. Not only do they encourage teachers to recognize their weaknesses and even failures, but also point to solutions. Responses from teachers are also interjected throughout each chapter. The book promotes reflection and the overall examination of your own interactions with students.

At times, the authors even poke fun at teachers regarding their beliefs about “those bad kids” and the teachers that have trouble managing them. Their interjections of sarcasm remind us of the teachers that we all know who fit the bill. Ultimately, the authors want readers to realize that the relationships (both positive and negative) we have with students require the work of both parties. The challenges teachers have with their students may also carry over to their relationships with adults too.

Throughout the book, personal stories are shared to provide connections for the reader. Guiding questions help to put actions in context. The brief chapters end with 3-5 suggested activities. The format is reader-friendly and can serve as a professional development tool or teacher resource.

The reader will undoubtedly find themselves nodding their heads in agreement, picturing students, parents and colleagues who come to mind as you read the stories that the authors tell. This book will appeal to teachers of kindergarten through grade 12. Various suggestions are offered for schoolwide implementation at the team and classroom level, as well as the individual level. The book ends on a proactive note, suggesting ways to prevent future problems with students, colleagues and parents.

Reviewed by Jacie Maslyk, M. Ed., Principal, Crafton Elementary School, Pittsburgh, PA. and a doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

McMullen, Carol. (2009). *The Bully Solution: A Parent's Guide: Effective and Practical Ways to Empower Your Child and Stop Bullying in Its Tracks*. New York: Scholastic.

Pages: 160 Price: \$27.00 ISBN: 978-0439024228

Bullying is the most common form of violence in our society. Every day thousands of teens wake up afraid to go to school. Bullying is a problem that affects millions of students of all races and classes. A student is being bullied when he or she is “exposed, repeatedly and over time,” to abuse or harassment by one or more other students (Olweus, 1996).

Studies have found that approximately 30 percent of students in grades 6-10 are involved in bullying, as a perpetrator, victim, or both (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2003; Harris and Isernhagen, 2003; Cohn and Canter, 2003; Bowman, 2001; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001). Of the 30% of students involved in bullying, researchers from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) report that 13 percent say they bully other students, 11 percent report being bullied, and 6 percent say they are both bullies and victims (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2003). Eight percent of students say they are victimized at least once a week (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001).

Combating bullying is a mission that requires cooperation between everyone involved. Parents, the school, and the community must work together to stop bullying. In her latest title *The Bully Solution: A Parent's Guide*, Carol McMullen thoroughly investigates all aspects of the bullying process and provides parents a step by step guide to deal with bullying.

The Bully Solution: A Parent's Guide groups bully-proofing activities and strategies into seven chapters. In the first two chapters, McMullen provides an overview of bullying issues. She starts with facts and research about bullying and moves to topics including characteristics of bullies, bullied children, and bystanders, and later provides invitations to think about the discipline philosophy parents follow to guide their children, and about what works and what doesn't.

The book then moves from the theoretical to the practical. McMullen introduces many techniques and practical ideas for dealing with bullies including talking with the child, using literature to support discussions, and working with the child to develop a bully-proofing plan.

Parents usually react in disbelief when told that their child is a bully. Often they have no idea that their child is harassing other children. Yet knowing the facts—and acting to change the situation—is vitally important in making the future safer for children. In her book, McMullen includes a look at the issue from the side of “what if the bully is my child?” and provides suggestions for helping children experience positive interactions with other people, build successful relationships and accept responsibility for aggressive behavior.

In the final chapter, McMullen touches on the very timely issue of cyber bullying. It is when a child, preteen or teen is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child, preteen or teen using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones. It has to have a minor on both sides, or at least have been instigated by a minor against another minor. In this chapter, McMullen provides practical ways for preventing cyber bullying and tactics for dealing with it. She also includes suggestions about how to help children navigate the Internet safely, useful techniques for spotting cyber bullying in action, and tips on deciphering the Internet abbreviations and acronyms children use.

The problem of bullying has attracted a lot of attention in recent years. As parents, teachers, and communities we need to do whatever we can to protect children and guide them in the right choices when it comes to a bullying situation. The demand for information on this subject is at an all-time high, and there are many fine materials available on the topic of bullying. However with *The Bully Solution: A Parent's Guide*, Carol McMullen has created a wonderful resource for parents of young children.

This book is a valuable source of information for parents, teachers, students and communities. It tells of signs to watch for in your child to detect if he is bullied or if he is bullying, and questions to be asked. It provides what-if scenarios and other bully-proofing activities that enable children to deal effectively with a variety of difficult situations and personalities. In addition, it presents strategies for addressing bullying episodes with teachers and administrators, and the latest information and strategies for cyber bullying. The writing, and the cartoon-like pictures, made this book enjoyable and it could be a great conversation starter for parents and kids.

The focus of this book is mainly on individual bullying incidents such as name-calling, teasing, and general nastiness and how to deal with such bullying activities. One recommendation I would make for improving this book is to suggest that in her next edition the author add chapters that deal with bullying issues that include groups such as gang bullying, making threats, and illegal bullying activities.

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

The Obama Education Plan. An Education Week Guide. (2009). . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pages: 240 Price: \$14.95 ISBN: 978-0-470-48209-4

Now that the presidential election is over, many people are wondering if the education reforms proposed by the Obama-Biden administration are feasible. The book, *The Obama Education Plan*, is a collection of reprinted *Education Week* articles from the years 2006-2008 that contain reports about past education reforms related to the Obama proposals demonstrating how they have played out in public schools across America. Education administrators, education policy makers, and education reformers will be interested in examining the potential outcomes of the Obama educational plan in part one and the advice to the president included in part two of the book. Schools from pre-K through 12 are the focus of the book. Topics include: early childhood education, the No Child Left Behind Law, school choice, math and science education, the dropout rate, extending learning time, teacher education, teacher retention and recruitment, and access to college.

The book is divided into two parts. Part one, "The Education Plan," sets the tone for each chapter with a quote from the Obama Education Plan. Part two, "Advice," consists of short statements by a variety of educational stakeholders giving advice to the president and the excerpts from the National Academy of Education Recommendations White Papers Projects. The book also has an appendix with a reprint of an overview of The Obama-Biden Education Plan from the campaign website. Both sections of the book contain similar topics but they are presented in different formats.

"The Education Plan" is presented in an opposing views format where feasible. Quotes from Barack Obama's education reforms are used as the premise for each issue. Reprinted articles from *Education Week* demonstrate the pros and cons of implementing the reform by reporting the results that comparable past reforms have had in public schools across America. There are no chapter introductions or conclusions which draw out the themes or sum up the findings leaving the reader to make their own judgments based on the evidence presented. The articles in the chapter "Invest in Early Childhood Education" cite studies based on Chicago's head start program which focuses on increasing teacher qualifications and pay to match K-12 teachers to rationalize federal funding (pp. 5-7, 9). Although the Obama administration acknowledges the importance of preschool and the need to make it affordable for parents, it does not specifically mention the possible benefits to society or increases in teacher pay (Obama & Biden, 2007a; Invest in Zero to Five Early Childhood Education section). The articles used to form the con arguments are based on universal, statewide preschool programs. Most of those arguments focus on standardizing the measurements for preschool quality and the definition of school readiness to judge their effectiveness (pp. 11-12, 14-15).

One of the articles in the chapter "Reform No Child Left Behind" suggests that the law created a tug of war for control between urban school administrators versus principals and teachers. It is stated that the administrators support the law because "it gives them leverage to force changes in schools that otherwise would be resisted by principals and teachers" while teachers oppose the recommendations that would tie their pay to student performance (p. 30). Other arguments against the law include inflated test scores, disadvantages for high-achieving students, and the inability of schools to achieve national standards (pp. 33-35, 39). There are no articles which take a strong stance in favor of No Child Left Behind.

The chapter "Charter Schools" has more balance than the previous chapter as it contains pro and con arguments but the study groups are not comparable. Charter schools were studied in Chicago and it was found that high school students who graduated from charter schools were more likely to attend college but found no benefits in educational attainment for elementary and middle school students (p. 52). According to a national study elementary and middle school student in charter schools scored lower on achievement tests in reading and mathematics (p. 56). However, the Sophie B. Wright, charter school, which is located in New Orleans, reports increases in achievement on state tests crediting their success to experienced teachers, small class size, and male mentors (pp. 64-65). These articles give the impression that individual charter schools are showing student improvement but these results cannot be generalized to show that as a whole, charter schools are more effective increasing student achievement when compared to public schools.

The chapter "Make Math and Science National Priorities" describes the efforts of various schools to incorporate science into their classrooms. Efforts include pairing teachers with federal scientists, having science labs in schools, and building high schools which specialize in science (pp. 82, 91-92). There were no arguments against math and science education made by educators and administrators included. However, in a survey conducted by Public Agenda (2006), 49% of parents indicated that they did not believe their children were not receiving enough math and science in school and only 24% of students thought that more math and science classes were needed to improve American education (Public Agenda, 2006; Questions P4, K23). More perspectives from students and parents were needed in *The Obama Education Plan* to gauge reactions to school reform as the views of educators, administrators, and policymakers dominate all of the discussions.

The chapter "Dropout Rate" examines several innovative programs for decreasing the high school dropout rate. Programs demonstrate that early intervention in middle schools can prevent dropping out in high school by identifying struggling students early (p.104). A research project conducted in Chicago which studied high schools students found that students placed the responsibility for dropping out on themselves and not their schools. They also discovered that students withdrew from their studies because they found them irrelevant to their lives outside of school (p. 110). For English language learners, schools with mixed levels of language proficiency are reported to be effective in preventing dropping out but difficult for teachers to implement lessons (p. 112). Based on the evidence presented, it appears as though different factors contributing to the dropout rate and a multitude of approaches are needed based on the student body of each school.

Contributing to the discussion on extending the school day, lengthening the school year, and after school programs, the chapter "Expand Opportunities to Learn" includes articles which show promising results especially for low income students. According to schools run by the Knowledge Is Power Program, low income students in 8 ½ hour schools days, attending school every other Saturday, and during three weeks of the summer, show vast improvement in college preparatory courses (p. 127). The opposing view was not presented in the book but it is prevalent in places like Milwaukee. Longer school days and lengthening the school year were proposed by Superintendent William Andreopoulos for Milwaukee Public Schools on March 16, 2009 to boost student achievement but he faces opposition from the teacher's union on the grounds that ""doing

the same thing we're doing now, just doing it longer, isn't going to produce results" (Borsuk, 2009). There is also some pushback from parents across the country who have organized to protest lengthening the school year (Janofsky, 2005).

Low income students appear to benefit from after school programs. In her article, Debra Viadero (2007) refers to the Promising Afterschool Programs study which found that, "Disadvantaged students who regularly attend top-notch afterschool programs end up, after two years, academically far ahead of peers who spend more out-of-school time in unsupervised activities" (pp.132-133). There were no studies cited on the effects of these proposals on children from middle-income and higher-income families.

The chapter "Recruit, Prepare, Retain, and Reward America's Teachers" contains a number of ideas regarding teacher training and accountability. Teacher training was linked to recruitment and retention. Teachers in residency programs work with mentors in high-need urban schools. It is theorized that better trained teachers are better able to cope with circumstances in high-need urban schools which in turn will aid in their retention. It was found that in Boston, 90% of their graduates are still teaching after three years (pp. 141).

Accountability was linked to advancement and pay in several articles. An article reports on the Michigan schools chief Michael P. Flanagan's proposal for a three tiered teacher licensing system in which advancement was based on performance instead of professional development courses and workshops (p.147). Other measures included in the chapter are mentoring requisites and professional portfolios for advancement (p.148). There was also an article on measuring teacher performance in which classroom observations and assessment results are criticized as being ineffective indicators of teacher impact on student learning (p.158). The chapter ended with an article about the merits of and concerns regarding performance based pay (pp. 153,154,155).

Suggested approaches to increasing access to college included in the chapter "Increase Affordability and Access to College" are offering aid in completing the financial-aid application; writing the entrance essay, and choosing a college (p. 171). It is even recommended that universities work to lower their tuition (p. 176). Some of the suggestions may be construed as an invasion to privacy such as linking federal financial aid applications to the Internal Revenue Service (p. 178). Sending statements to low income families about how much they should be saving for college may be impractical for households living paycheck to paycheck (p. 179). I was surprised to find that no one recommended more communication between the higher education admission officials and secondary education administrators to establish graduation requirements more closely aligned with university admission requirements for students who are college bound. Input should also be sought from representatives in career fields that are feasible to pursue with only a high school diploma if students choose not to go to college.

Section Two, "Advice," is similar in its structure to the book, *Letters to the Next President* (Glickman, 2007). Instead of open letters to the next president, the comments given in *The Obama Education Plan* are in interview style format and not addressed to anyone in particular. The paragraph-long responses are not organized by topic, but are brief enough to not overwhelm the reader. The purpose of this section is to provide a forum for various stakeholders, to provide an insider's look at the state of the public school system and to give advice based on the first hand experiences of the authors.

Similarities also exist between the changes requested in *Letters to the Next President* (Glickman, 2007) and the educational proposals put forth by President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden. Curriculum changes are usually at the top of the list of educational reforms. Now more than ever reformers call for the return of civic education making community service part of the curriculum in order to promote good citizenship which is a growing trend in many states (Glickman, pp. 202-203, 206; Walling, 2007, Where Does Civic Education Stand Now? section). The response by Arne Duncan parallels Obama's goal to require community service for school districts which receive federal grants (*The Obama Education Plan*, p. 196; Obama & Biden, 2007a, Enlist Parents and Communities to Support Teaching and Learning section). Other curriculum changes mentioned in the recommendations and the Obama administration focus on the closing achievement gap for students from low income families and disadvantaged students (*The Obama Education Plan*, p. 194; Obama & Biden, 2007b, Close the Achievement Gap section).

Both works also express the need for more federal funding for school programs. A correlation was made between school funding and achievement by Mark Ginsberg, Executive Director, National Association for the Education of Young Children and Obama (*The Obama Education Plan*, p.197; Obama & Biden, 2007a, Accountability from Washington section). Others, such as former U.S. Senator Jim Jeffords and freelance education writer, Alexander Russo, express the concern that federal money is budgeted to fund school programs but the money is not used properly (Glickman, p. 43; *The Obama Education Plan*, p. 207). Obama also addresses this concern with performance reviews to reform or halt unsuccessful programs and to increase funding for successful programs. He also plans to fully fund his educational plan (Obama & Biden, 2007b, Accountability from Washington and, A Commitment to Fiscal Responsibility sections). Moreover, the Director of the Center for School Change, Joe Nathan, recommends providing better choices for parents and Obama supports this by proposing the creation of a school fund to give parents a selection of different kinds of public schools to chose (*The Obama Education Plan*, p. 205; Obama & Biden, 2007b, Create an Innovative Schools Fund section).

The No Child Left Behind Law is a common concern among several educators and administrators. There are varying views on the subject. Obama suggests reforming the No Child Left Behind Law by using a variety of different approaches including testing and portfolios to measure achievement instead of a just one standardized test. Phillip Howard, founder and president of Common Good, a nonprofit, nonpartisan legal reform coalition, does not agree that the No Child Left Behind Law should be reformed and advocates getting rid of it altogether. He wants to replace No Child Left Behind with national standards for learning with local control and accountability (*The Obama Education Plan*, p. 201; Obama & Biden, 2007a, Reform No Child Left Behind section).

Teacher education and recruitment are themes mentioned in the statements to the next president, but retention was absent from the discussion. Houston's Superintendent of Knowledge Is Power Program, Mike Feinberg, states, "...having highly qualified teachers is a very important and noble goal. Unfortunately, it's just wound up getting interpreted as highly certified teachers" (pp. 196-197). The Obama administration speaks to this concern by requiring that teacher education programs be accredited and that the assessments for certification require evidence of the ability to teach (Obama & Biden, 2007a, Recruit, Prepare, and Retain, and Reward America's Teachers section). Although Obama and the interviewees express the need for teacher recruitment, other key players in education tend to agree that teacher retention is a more pressing issue because of shortage of teachers willing to work in and stay in high needs schools and the high turnover rate for new teachers in general (*The Obama Education Plan*, pp. 202, 210; Glickman, pp.132, 146). In addition, many teachers suggest higher pay in high need districts, more support from administrators, reduction of student discipline problems, and greater autonomy to reduce turnover (Glickman, pp. 132, 145, 146). However, the Obama administration stresses more training for high need districts, mentoring for new teachers, and compensation based on a career ladder (Obama & Biden, 2007a, Recruit, Prepare, Retain, and Reward America's Teacher section).

Another similarity between the Obama-Biden educational reforms and the interviewees is the goal of schools. Obama and Biden (2007b) state that the goal of schools is to "prepare our children for success in college and the workforce" thus emphasizing the preparation of students to become productive members of society (para. 1). Professors Linda Darling-Hammond and Kris Guitierrez as well as Beverly Hall, Superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools reflect these concerns in their recommendations. Schools must provide skills needed for graduates to be competitive in the modern workplace (pp. 194, 198, 199).

Obama's proposals (2007a) also call for increased parental responsibility in monitoring their children's behavior and greater participation in their children's learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom which is in agreement with the administrators such as Kathleen McCartney (Responsibility from Parents and Washington section, para.1 and 2). Kathleen McCartney, Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, requests to have the president tell parents "to turn off the television, to help their children find a quiet place to study, and parents should be checking their children's homework" (p. 204). Both stress practical ways for parents to take an active role in ensuring the success of their children assuming that parents have the skill level to accurately check their children's homework.

The methodology supporting section one of the book consists of reprinting articles from Education Week that were related to topics on education mentioned on the Obama-Biden administration's campaign website. Part two of the book contains brief statements given by mostly high profile figures in education and the National Academy of Education White Papers Project. The book does not mention how the statements from twenty-four educators and students were chosen for inclusion in the book. It is noted in the introductory paragraphs for Chapter 9 that the statements were taken from a larger project, Advice for President-Elect Obama, and were not originally intended to be included in the book (p.193). Some of the comments appear to have been made before the presidential election. Only one of the vignettes refers to President-elect Obama by name (pp. 196, 210).

Overall, the Obama Education Plan an Education Week Guide is a balanced view of education reforms. Success stories are presented using studies and interviews to corroborate the results. Education administrators, policy makers, and reformers will benefit from having the relevant Education Week articles conveniently organized for them by topic in central location. Failures are also represented with analysis to inform the reader of why the reform failed and how in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes. Although the book never directly examines President Obama's education proposals, it does address the pertinent educational topics of our time. The advice to the president section is a valuable forum for the stakeholders in education: educators, policymakers, administrators, and students to give their recommendations for change based on their knowledge and experience. However, the prospective of people identifying themselves solely as concerned parents, who do not work directly in education, were not included. Parents definitely have expectations regarding the nature and purpose of education for their children and it would be beneficial to include them in the conversation.

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Popham, W. James. (2009). *Unlearned Lessons: Six Stumbling Blocks to our Schools' Success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Pages: 166 Price: \$24.95 ISBN: 978-1-934742-14-3

The process of teaching and learning in today's K-12 classrooms is far from perfect. As a university professor of middle and secondary education, I am acutely aware of the obstacles that block quality learning experiences for students. Some of these educational pitfalls are those discussed in W. James Popham's book *Unlearned Lessons: Six Stumbling Blocks to our Schools' Success*. In this book, Popham argues that there are "six specific mistakes educators persist in making—repeat mistakes that harm students educationally" (p. viii). It is his goal in writing this book to become an instrument of change and help break the cycle of these educational errors.

The overall flow of the book is quite smooth, with specific examples to support the author's argument. Popham also includes potential solutions to help teachers, administrators, and educational policy-makers reform the current educational climate. His arguments are clear and well-composed, with personal experiences and humor mixed in to keep the reader engaged. The author does, however, fail to include several powerful and useful arguments, which will be discussed later.

The book is structured quite logically, which adds to the overall quality of flow. In the book's preface, the author first describes his main argument, his extensive background in the field of education, reasons for writing his book, as well as how the book is structured. This preface lays a solid foundation for the following chapters, each of which details one of the six unlearned lessons that teachers and schools often repeat: "Too Many Curricular Targets," "Underutilization of Classroom (Formative) Assessment," a "Preoccupation with Instructional Process," the "Absence of Affective Assessment," "Instructionally Insensitive Accountability," and "Abysmal Assessment Literacy."

The writing style of *Unlearned Lessons* is such that its content is accessible for parents with school-aged children, to educational professionals of all levels. The book ends with a quick review of the six unlearned lessons, as well as a practical story of the Wyoming Department of Education's work to address some of these educational pitfalls. It is refreshing to end a book full of mistakes made in K-12 education with a success story. Such an ending provides hope that some of these unlearned lessons can indeed be corrected.

This book, however, is not without its faults. First, the process of teaching and learning is a highly interconnected one, an important educational theme that did not become apparent while reading this book. For instance, quality instructional design dictates that educators must first identify clear and meaningful learning goals before planning assessment strategies, and then lastly engaging in instructional planning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). More specifically, when teachers are learning to write instructionally strong lesson or unit plans (avoiding "A Preoccupation with the Instructional Process"), they first have to identify meaningful curricular targets, and the underlying skills students will obtain by the end of the unit or lesson (steering clear of "Too Many Curricular Targets"). Further, teachers should have evidence in their lesson and unit plans of both formative and summative assessment (staying away from "The Underutilization of Classroom Assessment" and "Abysmal Assessment Literacy"). Finally, they also must address the unique needs of learners in the classroom, which undoubtedly involves the use of formative assessments to measure diverse students' needs (again avoiding unlearned lessons two and six). It also involves incorporating affective assessments to determine student dispositions, interests, and values ("The Absence of Affective Assessment"). This illustration of quality lesson and unit design is meant to highlight that, by describing some type of unifying framework flowing through each chapter, the author could have made a much more robust argument. Ultimately, a stronger, more connected argument would only improve the likelihood of the author's goal of affecting change in K-12 education.

Specific to the unlearned lessons described in the book, little attention is paid to the fact that teachers need to individualize, or differentiate, their instruction based on students' needs as determined by formative assessments. The author correctly advocates for more formative and affective assessments, as well as increased assessment literacy, to inform instructional decisions and student learning. However, he does this on a classroom, and not individual level. Rarely will the results of any formative assessment indicate that remediating an entire class should be a teacher's most successful and effective instructional adjustment. This is not to say that these assessments do not help teachers realize their instructional strengths and weaknesses, as well as to allow students to recognize how they might learn most efficiently. I would argue that failing to individualize instruction after formatively assessing students is like eating pancakes without syrup. Teachers would be missing out on a great deal of powerful (and delicious!) information if the results of these assessments were used on a classroom and not individual level. School reformers would be wise to pay attention to how formative assessments can help drive instruction that will help *all* students in the classroom achieve maximum growth, and not an aggregate measure of classroom learning.

In *Unlearned Lessons*, Dr. Popham provides a strong, clear, and logical voice for K-12 educational change in America. With many years of educational experience, there is strong support for the lessons he describes, that as of yet, have gone unlearned. Indeed, even slight deviations from these negative instructional practices would make a difference in the lives of many of our nation's students. By helping the reader see connections among the various unlearned lessons espoused in

this book, and placing the focus of formative assessment on helping individual students achieve academic and affective success, the author could make greater strides towards reforming the K-12 United States education system.

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Reviewed by Eric M. Carbugh, Ph.D., Department of Middle and Secondary Education, James Madison University.

Price, Hugh B. (2008). *Mobilizing the Community to Help Students Succeed*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Pages: 141 Price: \$21.95 ISBN: 978-1-4166-0696-3

In 1994, the National Urban League selected Hugh B. Price as the organization's CEO and president. Immediately, Price focused on decreasing the achievement gap between underprivileged students and those who have much support from parents and the community in which they live. His book, *Mobilizing the Community to Help Students Succeed*, is a quick guide to help educators work with the community in order to help students become more successful in the public school system. The five chapters of the book help the reader understand why a great achievement gap exists between students, highlight the kind of programs that have worked in diminishing the gap and, discuss how to set up, start and gain community support for the programs. The book stresses the importance of students' natural curiosity to learn and ways to keep that curiosity alive instead of letting it burn out before they graduate from high school.

This book offers a plethora of ideas for programs to motivate students and to exhibit student success. Each short and easy to read chapter includes subsections with bulleted lists of tips, resources or steps to take to initiate a program or gain community involvement for a program, and concludes with a list of key points creating a quick guide for points of interest. The majority of the references in the book come from sources more recent than 2002. At 141 pages, the book serves as a quick guide to begin, organize and win community support for programs to help students succeed.

Price focuses on going beyond the school walls to form community-based programs and organizations to help students achieve educational goals. Price believes that a struggling student will have a much better chance if more people in the community are involved in that student's life. Keeping students occupied with programs, providing mentors and allowing them to network in the community are all ways to keep students interested and invested in their own achievement.

The fourth chapter offers information about how some successful urban programs were initiated and what the program outcomes were. These real examples bring alive the stories of real people, inspiring the reader to take initiative and start similar programs. By looking easy to implement, the examples take away much of the questioning and stress that might accompany the starting of a new program or community group.

While the book outlines ideas for starting programs in urban communities, it offers very little insight for starting community programs in rural communities. Many of the programs would be very hard to start in smaller school districts without a larger city nearby. The programs pull from many community organizations such as churches, youth clubs, and the neighborhood as well as large corporate businesses. Without these organizations available to provide help, it would be difficult to make these programs successful in the rural context. Having said that, chapter five offers many resources to help start programs regardless of where the school district is. This chapter lists grants, websites and organizations that would be helpful in starting programs in smaller communities. This chapter also offers a guide to getting media attention for schools and programs. It provides ideas about how to benefit from the media and how to use the local media to gain support for programs by drawing attention to the great things the programs are doing.

Although the book has an urban school focus, the ideas in the book can be applied to many schools nationwide. Price not only offers ideas for specific programs but also gives advice in starting programs, gaining involvement from the community, and helping students to become motivated and successful. This book gives the reader the information needed to bridge the gap between community and school to help students become community leaders themselves.

Reviewed by Molly Goff, graduate student at Portland State University. She teaches at Banks School District in Banks, OR.

Robb, Laura. (2009). *Reading Strategy Lessons for Science and Social Studies*. New York: Scholastic.

Pages: 96 Price: \$16.99 ISBN: 0439926424

To function adequately in today's global society, a person needs to be able to read. Our current students will face even more literacy demands as they graduate and serve as our country's leaders and citizens (Kamil, et al., 2008). Therefore, providing the means for students to become successful readers is of utmost importance in our schools. Because of the importance of being literate in today's society, all teachers now need to not only help students learn the curriculum standards of their subject area, they also need to help students learn to read the texts that contain the learning for those

standards. While most upper elementary, middle and high school teachers know that a lack of comprehension while reading is the problem for many of their struggling students, knowing how to teach to that deficit is sometimes not common knowledge among those same teachers. Laura Robb's book *Reading Strategy Lessons for Science and Social Studies* provides the answer to the much-asked question: "But, how do I teach a student how to comprehend what he reads?"

Robb provides 15 research-based strategy lessons that will guide teachers as they help students learn to read and comprehend content-area texts. She suggests that a teacher look over all the lessons provided and choose to first teach the ones that are believed to most meet the needs of her students. Then, Robb suggests that the teacher model and scaffold the use of one of the strategies until students are able to use it independently or with a partner or group. When the students have learned a strategy to mastery, then another strategy may be introduced. The author writes that "...helping your students learn content is the primary goal of this book" (p. 9). So, while learning the strategy is important, it is also presented as a means to an end.

The strategies are organized into three of the five chapters in the book. The second chapter provides five lessons for use before reading. Chapter Three provides four lessons that teach strategies for use during reading. Chapter Four offers six lessons for helping students think about and really learn from what they have read after the reading is accomplished. Teachers will find Robb's presentation of the elements of each strategy lesson to be very supportive. At the beginning of each chapter, the strategy is introduced, the purpose for using the strategy is explained, materials needed are listed, the time needed to model the lesson is given, and then the suggested presentation is provided. The introduction of each lesson is even scripted so that teachers have a very concrete way to introduce the strategy. Teacher think-alouds are scripted as well so that teachers can learn how to model the strategies. For teachers who do not know how to support reading comprehension in their students' learning, this book would be a very strong ally.

Robb encourages the teacher to "shift from feeling that you must pass information on to students and instead ask them to be actively involved in their learning before, during, and after they read and study any topic" (p. 15). While these strategies will especially scaffold the learning of struggling students, all students will benefit from learning these strategies. Even though some upper elementary, middle, and high school students are not challenged by text at present, most will eventually meet a text that is difficult to comprehend. For them, learning that there are supports that even successful readers use to accomplish the reading and comprehension of difficult text is valuable knowledge.

In addition to the 15 reading strategies, Robb also provides sample handouts for student use. There are also two text passages provided that may be used by the teacher as she first introduces the strategy. And, a very informative chapter on using primary sources for student learning is included as well. Teachers will find *Reading Strategy Lessons for Science and Social Studies* to be a teacher/user-friendly book that offers valuable information for student comprehension of content-area texts.

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Kandy Smith is a doctoral candidate in literacy studies at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. As a school consultant for the Tennessee State Improvement Grant, she works in classrooms across the state, supporting teachers as they work to improve student literacy.

Schiro, Michael S. (2009). *Mega-Fun Math Games and Puzzles for the Elementary Grades: 125 Ready-to-Use Activities that Teach Math Facts, Concepts, and Thinking Skills*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pages: 309 Price: \$24.95 ISBN: 978-0-470-34475-0

Hello, teachers! Have we not been disappointed many times with the books that promise its effectiveness and handiness in the classroom with the fancy titles and covers? Today, our search for "the one" in the sea of instructional resources is finally over with *Mega-Fun Math Games and Puzzles for the Elementary Grades: 125 Ready-to-Use Activities that Teach Math Facts, Concepts, and Thinking Skills* by Michael S. Schiro. The book is exactly what it says on the title. The book is flowing with FUN games and puzzles that stimulate elementary students to learn mathematics. In addition, it does not require spending big money for preparing materials; reproducible illustrations and inexpensive materials are all we need. Also, the book is not limited for teaching mathematics; it can be easily integrated across the academic curriculum. If you are still not convinced, continue reading the next paragraph.

The main purpose of the book is to help teachers and parents to better understand the relationship of "learning mathematics" while "playing games." The author explains the relationship with a variety of games and puzzles rather than with the abstract text. The author introduced the content and process standards of mathematics in two parts: "Math Skill Development Games" and "Problem-Solving Mathematics Puzzles."

Part one, "Math Skill Development Games," contains a wide range of arithmetic games that help elementary students learn, remember, and practice basic arithmetic facts, skills, and concepts. The games use inexpensive and readily available

materials: egg cartons, paper and pencils, tongue depressors, blank cards (or index cards), wood cubes (or dice), and paper board.

Part two, "Problem-Solving Mathematics Puzzles," offers higher order thinking skills with a variety of games and puzzles. The games and puzzles focus on the process standards of mathematics: problem solving, reasoning and proof, communication, representation, and connections. The topics of games and puzzles in part two apply mathematics to other areas of study, including algebra, logic, geometry, graph theory, number theory, knot theory, topology, and transformational geometry. The games and puzzles also use various instructional media: visual images (in bridge crossing puzzles), physical manipulatives (in crayon digits), and students' physical movements (in people puzzles). Both parts of the book consist of the variations of the games and puzzles by following the standards from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). The Game Grade Level and NCTM Content Area Reference Chart display the connection between games and particular content areas in detail. The book fosters not only the content and process standards of mathematics but also helps elementary students to acquire non-mathematical skills: language skills, hand-eye coordination, concentration and mental alertness, sense of spatial orientation, visual discrimination, memory, timing, and social interactions, etc.

Mega-Fun Math Games and Puzzles for the Elementary Grades: 125 Ready-to-Use Activities that Teach Math Facts, Concepts, and Thinking Skills delivers the author's promise for the readers. This book is a brilliant instructional resource for teachers and parents to have. However, I must point out one side-effect of the book: your students may not want to end the class because mine did not.

Reviewed by Mikyung Chung, Ed.D., a 2008 graduate of Bilingual Education at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. She is the beginners' class teacher at Corpus Christi Korean School. She is an advocate for "language across the curriculum" and has been practicing the academic content knowledge as a natural content for language learning.

Small, Gary & Vorgan, Gigi. (2008). *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind*. New York: Harper Collins.

Pages: 256 Price: \$24.95 ISBN: 978-0-06-134033-8

As we near the end of the first decade of the 21st century, there is no doubt that information technology is influencing most every aspect of life in the modern world. Although there are examples of K-12 educators who are using information technology effectively, and computers with Internet connections are available in many K-12 schools, it is reasonable to conclude that K-12 curriculum and instruction is one of the few activities in our society that proceeds largely as it did prior to the explosion of Internet-connected computers over the last three decades. *iBrain* is an excellent overview of what researchers have learned about the effects of Internet-connected computers and it defines the new starting line for educators who have yet to join the 21st century.

iBrain is written for general readers, not specifically educators, but Small and Vorgan make two important contributions to the growing literature informing educators who seek to use technology to create meaningful learning environments. First, the authors review the research suggesting the human brain does changes in response to the connected computing environment. Second, the authors provide hope for those who are reluctant users of technology by summarizing the tools that should be in one's repertoire and by arguing adults have an important role in helping digital natives become responsible users of technology.

Small is a medical doctor and Vorgan has experience writing for the popular culture. Using language that is understandable and entertaining, they provide a thorough review of research into issues such as continuous partial attention and online addiction that are affecting the individuals and the generations with whom K-12 educators work. In addition, the authors review research documenting the cultural impact of information technology on families and other social groups. After the first six chapters, it is easy to conclude the future is bleak; Small and Vorgan describe a range of problems that should cause educators to be concerned about students and their families.

In the last three chapters, however, Small and Vorgan argue adults, including and especially educators, have a role in helping the digital generations develop healthy and responsible patterns of technology use and in encouraging nurturing offline connections, as well as appropriate online connections. Small and Vorgan argue that adults must become competent users of information technology if they hope to have any credibility with digital natives, however.

Educators who take the short time necessary to read this book will find themselves understanding digital natives and understanding the affects of technology on young humans brains and the culture in which young human brains develop today. Educators will also find themselves better prepared to adopt reasoned and informed approaches to using information technology in their work and responding to young people's use of information technology.

Reviewed by Gary L. Ackerman, a doctoral candidate in educational technology management at Northcentral University who has extensive experience in K-12 education.

Willingham, Daniel T. (2009). *Why Don't Students Like School?: A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Why Don't Students like School? is an intriguing discussion of how the brain can actually impede a student's desire and ability to learn with suggestions to increase a student's learning capacity and desire to learn. The discussion is focused around nine principles that are centered on the brain's fundamental characteristics. These principles range from the mind's natural curiosity to the need to practice to become mentally proficient at any skill or area of knowledge.

One of the more interesting points the author makes is the idea that the brain is not actually designed for thinking, but instead to avoid thinking. The brain is actually designed to be super efficient in order to avoid thought. It uses both working memory and long-term memory to assist people in completing tasks. It is the combination of working memory, long-term memory, information of one's environment, and the space in one's working memory that allow for people to solve problems, complete tasks, and all other mental functions which reduces the brain's need to think but still allows it to work quickly.

Understanding the elements of mental processes allows for important implications in the classroom. For example, instructors need to understand that students only have a limited capacity of working memory. This may require instructors to vary their tasks and classroom activities to not overload a student's working memory. In addition, instructors may have to employ different techniques that create less pressure on working memory; such as writing information on the blackboard or using handouts and slowing the pace especially for new material to allow students' brains to process the information.

Another feature illustrated in this book is the importance of relationships within the brain in understanding concepts, both new and old. For instance, it is easier for students to understand material if they have a connection to the material through information they already know. This may require the instructor to first figure out what students know so they can relate new concepts to this prior knowledge. This is also why factual knowledge is so important since in order to be able to complete a task, students need to be able to pull information from their long-term memory. If they do not have this information in their long-term memory it will be difficult for them to be able to complete a given task. It is important for the instructor to be able to allow students to create a connection between the information and ideas presented in the classroom to something that the students will remember later, whether it is inside the classroom or not.

The factual knowledge that creates the background knowledge students need to assist in understanding the instructor's ideas is also important in another concept demonstrated by the instructor—that of chunking. Chunking is the process of tying pieces of information together and is important because it frees up space in working memory. It also allows students to recall material quicker since they may not have to remember the entire concept but just a chunk of it to trigger the description and uses of a concept.

Additionally, the author debunks several myths throughout the book that are critical to understanding how the brain works. For example, he describes how relationships are created in the brain and discusses how an emotional connection to the information and/or repetition of the information is not sufficient enough in remembering concepts or ideas. Instead, it is more important to get students to think about the meaning of the information since "Memory is the residue of thought" (p. 47). In order to create a memory, students, and people in general, need to think conceptually how this information is connected to what they know to be able to store it in their brains. However, this does not mean that instructors need to recreate their material to reflect students' interests. In fact, the author points out that in many cases this does not work. Rather it is how the information is presented, or the instructor's style, that will allow the students to think about meaning. According to Willingham, style involves both personality as well as the organization of the material. If both of these are done in a way that creates an emotional bond between student and teacher than there is a higher probability that students will remember and understand the material.

This book also gives a large number of examples on the implications of understanding the brain better for instructors. For example, the author discusses how children do differ in terms of their intelligence but that intelligence can be changed through hard work; although it does not mention what type of hard work is required. At the end of this discussion, the author illustrates ways instructors can change the way students' think about their own intelligence. This includes praising students efforts and not necessarily their abilities, and the importance of assisting students in developing effective study skills. This discussion is useful and gives instructors and administrators a place to start in thinking of how to assist their students. However, it does not take into account the many different work settings of teachers. For instance, some instructors may work in a school district that has policies that force teachers to teach a specified set of content in a certain way, which would not allow for changes in lesson plans or slowing the pace of instruction. Instructors will have to review the suggestions given and may need to think about how they may be able to implement the author's ideas into their classrooms without violating any school policies.

In addition, this book seems to focus on working with students at the elementary or the secondary level of education and does not really make mention of how to work with students in college. Many college students may not have been able to go to schools that allowed them to develop their mental capacities and are now struggling to do well in their college courses. This is an important issue that many college instructors and professors struggle with—getting their students to think about the meaning of information. Suggestions for college instructors would be beneficial in creating a higher caliber of student.

This book is easy to read given the author's examples and illustrations; however, many of Willingham's suggestions and principles seem to be common sense. He seems to be reminding readers of the brain's functions and the usefulness of these principles within classroom instruction. The insights the author gives instructors are worth the read especially given that the chapters are short and provide detailed information without using scientific vocabulary to allow instructors to rethink how they think about their students. It also allows reminds them how they can work with students to learn the material and maybe even begin to like school and the materials they are learning.



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