ASU Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College

National Education Policy Center

education review // reseñas educativas

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

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

reseñas educativas (Spanish)
resenhas educativas (Portuguese)

Brief reviews for February 2009

Szymusiak, Karen, Sibberson, Franki, & Koch, Lisa. (2008). *Beyond Leveled Books: Supporting Early and Transitional Readers in Grades K-5.* Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Pages: 254 Price: $19.50 ISBN: 978-157110-714-5

For teachers who have all of their classroom library books labeled, and stored in baskets according to level designations, the first few pages of *Beyond Leveled Books: Supporting Early and Transitional Readers in Grades K-5* may create an "Oh, no. You've got to be kidding!" response. But, if those same teachers are truly interested in teaching children not just to read but to love to read and creating a community of readers in their classrooms, they'll continue reading the book, and, when finished, will likely begin removing leveled stickers, relabeling baskets, and resorting books. This book provides the support needed for that change.

Describing the process of leveling books, the authors write that what began as an innocent and practical way of matching readers and books has shifted into "a dangerous national obsession" (p. ix). One of the first reasons the authors give for having a teacher examine carefully her leveling focus is that in the race for profit, publishers have lowered the quality of the leveled books offered. An essay by Lynn Salem and Josie Stewart is provided to help teachers examine their collections to determine which books are "high-quality leveled books" (p. 24). An article by Diane DeFord and Adria Klein presents the positive aspects of leveled books and the "cautions for using leveled books for readers" (p. 10). Teachers with bins of leveled books will want to examine their practice against both as they read this book and think seriously about the needs of transitional readers.

The authors are certainly not against leveling books and matching readers and books but warn that when the classroom library is organized by levels, children may believe that levels are the most important way to choose a book. An introductory essay by author Lisa Koch about her son's experience with leveled books may bring tears to the reader's eyes. It may make teachers stop and think, "Have I done that?".

When books are organized by genre or author or "favorite book characters" or "books we've read aloud" (p. 27), children begin thinking about books in these ways, making their reading more enjoyable and profitable. Included in this book are lists like "favorite book character baskets" (p. 28) and "books we love for kindergarten and first-grade classroom libraries: books to have alongside leveled books" (p. 32). There is also a wonderful chapter examining series books that includes a chart with the name of the series and author, how the text is setup, how chapter titles support the readers, hooks, how dialogue is presented, whether or not pictures are included, and more details that help a teacher know how much support a transitional reader will receive in these texts.

The authors' writing skills are excellent and make the book very enjoyable reading. Sentences like "…the levels became invisible badges that students wore to enter a not-so-invisible race" (p. 13) really use language to drive the authors' message home. Many of the chapters include brief essays from additional authors and mini-lessons that highlight the use of specific books in the classroom.

The main point the authors make concerning leveled books and transitional readers is that when kids' reading is driven only by the level race, their view of reading is narrowed. It makes reading about achievement, about moving to the next level, about "production." The authors even heard children who were in classrooms where the leveling process was highly regarded make comments like "what difference does it make" as they selected books from leveled bins. Expanding the definition of a "just-right" book is important in getting past reading as a leveled process. The authors of *Beyond Leveled Books: Supporting Early and Transitional Readers in Grades K-5* re-define a "just-right" book and then offer teachers much guidance and support for putting readers and books together so that transitional readers develop not only the ability to read but a love and appreciation of reading as well.

Reviewed by Kandy Smith, a doctoral student 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, helping

teachers to improve student literacy practices.

Essley, Roger; Rief, Linda & Rocci, Amy Levy (2008). *Visual Tools for Differentiating Reading and Writing Instruction.* New York: Scholastic.

Pages: 144 Price: $19.99 ISBN: 9780439899086

As stated in the introduction of this wonderful teaching book about storyboarding, *Visual Tools for Differentiating Reading and Writing Instruction*, a book about using visuals in the classroom might seem like a waste of time for teachers today, considering all of the state testing demands our students and classrooms are facing. Right? Actually, not so. The authors argue that, today, more than ever, when ALL of our students are expected to achieve high levels of literacy, stretching our instructional techniques to include more picture-based instruction, is essential. Need more convincing? The authors look to the words of some of the greatest thinkers of all time: Albert Einstein said, "If I can't picture it I can't understand it." Aristotle said, "It is impossible even to think without a mental picture" (p. 6).

I hope I have now persuaded you that storyboarding might be something to try in your classroom. If you need further enticement, consider that storyboarding is an excellent differentiation tool—visual instruction benefits strugglers; in his introduction, Essley cites several special education students who have learned how to comprehend difficult text via storyboarding. But it is not just for students with learning problems, either. After reading this book, I used some of Essley's techniques with my daughter who is six years old but reading on about a fourth-grade level. I taught her these techniques to ensure that she will become an excellent comprehender of complicated texts as well as the fabulous decoder that she already is. Oh, yeah, and storyboards are not just for students, struggling or high-achieving. They are also used by many successful professionals: writers, engineers, film-makers, horticulturalists and other scientists.

So what exactly is storyboarding, I'm sure you are now wondering. A storyboard is a series of boxes, generally about 3 by 4 that tell a story. I would compare a storyboard to a month-at-a-glance calendar. Just as you might like to keep a daily agenda with all of the details of your life but might glance at a monthly calendar to help you see the overall structure of your month, a storyboard helps readers to see the general structure of any story. It is a pictorial map through a book, essay, or other structure. And this is not just a technique for artists—the author makes it very clear that anybody can do simple bold and black stick figures with just a few captions in each box. Even the most reticent teacher can draw thirty-second stick figures and then gain art experience as his or her students take this technique and run with it. This technique is very versatile—and fast. It can be used to analyze characters, map out scenes of difficult plays, and when a teacher gains experience, it can even be used to teach grammar and to aid memory in history and social studies. In this day of budget cuts across our schools, it has the potential to raise comprehension, retention, and therefore test scores, and it is inexpensive as it does not require any special equipment.

In conclusion, I highly recommend this book. The introduction explains the need for storyboarding in the classroom. Then the first section gives detailed instructions for how to begin storyboarding, even if you do not feel like a confident artist. The middle chapters walk readers, probably in a little more detail than necessary, through a personal narrative project in which students used storyboarding as prewriting. But my favorite parts of the book were the small gems scattered throughout that demonstrate the true adaptability of storyboarding. As a literacy specialist, I know how important revising and conferencing is to the improvement of student writing. But, as many of us know, revision is not something students like to do. Essley, aptly demonstrates that when students plan their writing using storyboards, we can easily pinpoint problems with logic or in other areas, before students write out an entire paper that they have the potential of becoming painfully attached to. This could save both teachers and students a lot of trouble. My final favorite thing I learned in this book was how to use storyboarding to help students understand difficult literary techniques in novels, such as subplots and foreshadowing.

I hope I have influenced you to read this book. I learned some great techniques that I can't wait to try out in my classroom. I am sure that, if you give this book a chance, you will too!

Reviewed by May Dartez, 6-8th Grade Title Language Arts Teacher, Kings Bridge Middle School.

Evans, Elrena & Grant, Caroline (2008). *Mama, PhD: Women Write About Motherhood and Academic Life.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Pages: 262 Price: $19.95 ISBN: 978-0-8135-4318-5

The struggle to balance one's personal and professional lives is an oft discussed topic with no easy answer. Women in academia just happen to write about it more poetically.

Mama, PhD, by Evans and Grant, presents a topic that is esoteric; geared for a small, specific group of women who are intimate with the ivory tower either as graduate students and/or as mamas with Ph.D.s. The book is a composite of 35 lyrical and eloquent essays from women in academia that address pregnancy and teaching while pregnant, raising children, dealing with family responsibilities, and the pressures of trying to gain tenure. Contributors to the anthology include graduate students, part-time instructors, new entry professors, and veteran professors.

Evans and Grant organized the book into four sections: The Conversation, That Mommy Thing, Recovering Academic, and Momifesto. In The Conversation, there are nine essays from women who are contemplating having a baby, desiring a baby, have just recently found out that they are pregnant, and are teaching while pregnant. The essay that stood out in this

section was written by Jessica Smartt Guillon, a doctoral candidate at a woman's university at the time, who writes about her department chair, a woman known in the feminist world, calling her in and defrocking her of the graduate student assistantship that would pay for her tuition because of the pregnancy. On a conscious level, the reader is "shocked" that it happens but on the inner, intuitive level, it doesn't surprise us for we know these things happen, often behind closed doors.

In the second section, That Mommy Thing, the essay that stood out was "Two Boards and a Passion: On Theater, Academia, and the Art of Failure" by Anjalee Deshpande Nadkarni. Nadkarni writes, "All the seemingly impossible requirements for being a good mother and being a success in my chosen career seemed at odds" (p. 67) which is the theme echoed in every essay throughout the book.

The remaining two sections contain essays by mothers from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. Angelica Duran writes from the single mother-who-happens-to-be-of-a- minority-background perspective. Irena Auerbuch Smith writes about raising a child with a disability; Natalie Kertes Weaver admits that her enjoyment in her work has its costs, that "my parenting is influenced by my schedule" (p. 78) as Dr. Mommy. Leah Bradshaw, writing from the veteran perspective, looks back on the early years of her career and writes that they were "a random patchwork of crises, readjustments, and regrouping" (p. 121) but explains that while her love of philosophy and her love of her three children may at times compete for her attention, it is the two together that make her a woman, a mother, and a scholar.

Interspersed throughout the book are essays from women who chose to step off the career path, or "opt out" as has been coined, including both of the editors of *Mama, PhD*. Some stepped off the career path with ambivalent feelings about leaving, some work as non-traditional academics (NTA) and some hint that they'll return to the ivory tower when the timing is right. Most who stepped off the tenure track seem to have to defend stepping off the career path for the mommy track.

At this point, I must disclose that I am a mama with a Ph.D. who is also attempting to balance my professional and personal life. The essays in the book are prosaic and thoughtful, at times depressing and at times winning. I related to this book on many levels and I'm sure anyone who buys this book will find a story that she (am I being sexist here?) can relate to. The short essays provide for thoughtful reading in the midst of a busy life; however, the book does not offer any new insights that mamas with Ph.D.s do not already know. The essays from women who continued on the professional track tell us what we already know: that it takes effort to make both our professional and personal life coalesce, that at times one area will suffer because of the other. Is *Mama, PhD* worth the purchase? Sure. Does it offer any solutions? It makes the attempt by suggesting that universities give non-traditional academics access to resources, create part-time jobs, and make maternity leave flexible. The issue is a complex one and the essays only confirm that.

Reviewed by Kim Doan, Assistant Professor, West Chester University

---

Fisher, Douglas & Frey, Nancy. (2008). *Word Wise & Content Rich: Five Essential Steps to Teaching Academic Vocabulary.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pages: 173 Price: $21.00 ISBN: 978-0-325-01382-4

In my third year of teaching high school English at a K–12 public school in Louisville, Kentucky, I had an epiphany about my role as a classroom teacher. I was standing at the chalkboard listing a series of vocabulary words relevant to the Age of Imperialism in Africa: oppression, exploitation, colonization, burden, expansionism, etc. when I turned to my students and admitted, “It is all about vocabulary. That’s what my job actually is.” Teaching is the art of offering all students a greater access to the academic vocabulary necessary to communicate in a complicated, ever-changing world.

Perhaps this is why *Word Wise & Content Rich: Five Essential Steps to Teaching Academic Vocabulary* by Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey caught my attention. Their five steps to teaching academic vocabulary will be useful to modern classrooms. Fisher and Frey’s text is beneficial to any school aiming towards professional development, curriculum, and interdisciplinary school reform through a commitment to empowering students through the power of language. Mindful of pressures placed on content-area teachers to cover vast amounts of material, *Word Wise & Content Rich* models five ways to bring vocabulary instruction to the forefront of middle and high school curricula.

In the foreword, Karen Bromley writes “…this book is a natural for a teachers’ study group,” (p. ix) and I have to agree. Bromley recognizes that *Word Wise & Content Rich* is reader-friendly, well researched, and focused on a school-wide need for vocabulary reform. School administrators might choose this text to guide a staff through collaborative discussion that unites multiple disciplines. Department chairs might find Fisher and Frey’s work beneficial to localize the academic goals of their colleagues. Teacher educators might choose this text to provide a strong foundation for vocabulary instruction in student teachers of secondary education.

Word Wise & Content Rich is divided into seven chapters that provide a five- step framework for teaching vocabulary to adolescents from multiple content areas. The text argues vocabulary still matters; middle and high school educators should keep teaching academic vocabulary as they tailor personal instruction to the needs of specific content areas. The five steps to deliver academic vocabulary suggested by Fisher and Frey are 1) to make it intentional, 2) to make it transparent, 3) to make it useable, 4) to make it personable, and 5) to make it a priority. Each chapter is written with much consideration for the fast-paced lives of teachers and, therefore, is accessible, manageable and sharp. They are also written to bring students out of shallow word knowledge into a deeper word understanding (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2002).

Vocabulary still matters to middle and high school students because it is directly connected to reading, writing and communicating success. Yet, students often arrive to individual classrooms to receive departmentalized and disconnected

academic instruction. The pressure on teachers to meet state and national standards continues to increase and finding time to cover course materials is becoming more difficult. Yet, as Fisher and Frey discuss, all educators share a similar pedagogical task. Teachers enrich the worlds of their students through the introduction of new words, new applications for those words and new ways of thinking about the changing world through the power of these words. They argue middle and high school facilities should deliberately work to assist adolescents with how to best learn new words. Intentionally focusing on word acquisition creates a culture of self-aware learners. Vocabulary still matters to middle and high schools because it plays an important role in content knowledge, comprehension and academic achievement (i.e., Baker, 1985; Farley & Elmore, 1992 Flapp, Fisher & Flood, 2003; McKeown, 1985, Scarborough, 2001).

Word Wise & Content Rich uses the term "academic vocabulary" to describe the words that content-area teachers provide to better assist their students in specific subject areas. Teachers should select vocabulary deliberately. Drawing on the research of Graves (2006), Nagy (1988), and Marzano and Pickering (2005), Fisher and Frey offer ways to narrow down vocabulary lists, categorize new words, sort vocabulary to represent a subject, and to find ways to seek repeated vocabulary so that it is transportable, contextual, structural and cognitively-relevant (p. 26). Suggesting ways to create academic word lists and covering commonly used prefixes and suffixes, as well as capitalizing on teacher modeling, peer activities, independent work and the importance of creating a school-wide vocabulary initiative are powerful features of this text. Memorizing word lists has never effectively built vocabulary in adolescents. Instead, intentional strategies, suggested by Fisher and Frey, create self-directed maturity in students so they are better learners of new words.

Word Wise & Content Rich offers several ways a teacher can model vocabulary learning for students through teaching context clues, morphology, and accessing proper resources. Fisher and Frey write:

> We've got to get away from the mindset that academic vocabulary instruction is about teaching specific words. Rather, it's about teaching specific strategies for approaching all words, and remembering that the more we talk about and express an excitement and curiosity about new words, the more our students will absorb this attitude and bring it to bear in their own reading and writing (Bromley, 2007). (p. 47)

Good educators model how good readers, writers and thinkers unravel their understanding of new words. Teachers who don't find success from handing out wordlists to memorize are given a plan of action for what to do when one comes across new material that hasn't been mastered.

When working with the Louisville Writing Project in Kentucky, I learned the importance of creating writing spaces where dictionaries and thesauri were always accessible. As my students wrote to meet the standards of the celebrated Kentucky writing portfolio (Hillocks, 2002), it was my job to facilitate writers to learn to play with words and to become intentional with their word-choice and originality. This is, perhaps, why Chapter 4 makes the most sense to me. Peer-to-peer talk is essential in enabling students to be better readers and writers. Fisher and Frey write, "Academic vocabulary development doesn't come about only through listening" (p. 61) and use Chapter 4 as a mini-handbook for teachers to turn their classrooms into actively engaged, vocabulary environments where students learn together. Moving beyond teacher-centered instruction towards student-centered collaboration influences the vocabulary acquisition of adolescents. Students tend to be more engaged, Fisher and Frey argue, when they are asked to be participants in their own learning. Because of this, the authors guide readers through specific ways to create productive group work time and offer tips on producing successful peer interactions. Similar to the creation of a good writing environment, teachers can also be proactive in developing academic vocabulary to support good reading, writing and thinking. The text offers several useful templates for engaging students with new vocabulary and demonstrates useful strategies for building stronger collaboration amongst adolescents through the use of visuals, an exploration of relationships between words, the conceptualization of attributes, the noticing of subtle differences between words, and with the success of playing word games.

Word Wise & Content Rich suggests making vocabulary instruction personal and a priority. No individual student can personally grow to their full potential until teachers choose to prioritize teaching academic vocabulary. Specifically, Fisher and Frey address A-Z charts, vocabulary journals, word sorts, word cards, and mnemonics as different ways good educators can build their students' word use in school. They also demonstrate how to use vocabulary during the composing process through sharing examples of sentence work activities, as well as referring to Graff and Birkenstein's (2006) suggestion of using writing frames and templates to better facilitate composition. Adolescents in middle and high school environments move quickly from a need to know an individual word's definition to a more metacognitive need to use strong words to communicate in ways that move readers, argue a point and express new ideas. This doesn't occur, though, until educators deliberately make vocabulary acquisition personally relevant to their students.

A staff of teachers may not prioritize vocabulary, however, until a school decides for its members to focus deliberately on how academic words are taught. *Word Wise & Content Rich*, then, is a useful place for middle and high school leaders to begin a conversation about building academic vocabulary in their schools. Fisher and Frey offer suggestions including the use of word walls, words of the week, specific and intentional use of sustained silent reading, and a community commitment of demonstrating the importance of every word. They recognize students in the 21st Century read wider than any generation before them. This is why a school-wide commitment to building vocabulary through reading, writing and thinking is important.

Upon finishing *Word Wise & Content Rich*, I am left inspired to be a successful educator of academic vocabulary and to be a stronger coach of professionals to work words into their classrooms more effectively. The text has me considering how teachers might better use vocabulary to close the academic gaps that exist in many of our schools. I am also thinking about the ways teachers, departments and schools might gain additional funding for providing every classroom, in all content areas, with more dictionaries, thesauri and subject-specific wordbooks for students.

Yes, vocabulary matters in 2008 and Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey have written a vocabulary resource worthy of consideration by all middle and high school educators. "Words have no legs," a Mali proverb notes, "but still they walk."

Word Wise & Content Rich provides a well-paved road for the walk of academic vocabulary. Ruth Stone (1999) writes, "Words make the thoughts," (p. 38) and her Binghamton University colleague, Karen Bromley notes, "If we don't get word instruction right, we clip the wings of our students on many levels" (p. vii). *Word Wise & Content Rich* gets word instruction right by walking the reader through new, worthwhile thinking on how to best teach academic vocabulary in a liberating process for students.

References

Baker, L. (1985). Differences in the standards used by college students to evaluate their comprehension of expository text. *Reading Research Quarterly, 20*(3), 297–313.

Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bring words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction*. New York: Guilford.

Bromley, K. (2007). Nine things every teacher should know about words and vocabulary instruction. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 50*(7), 528-537.

Farley, M. J. & Elmore, P.B. (1992). The relationship of reading comprehension to critical thinking skills, cognitive ability, and vocabulary to a sample of underachieving college freshmen. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 52*(4), 921 – 31.

Flood, J., Lapp, D, & Fisher, D. (2003). Reading comprehension instruction. In J. Flood, D. Lapp, J.R. Squire & J.M. Jensen (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts*, Second Edition: pp. 931 – 41. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Graff, G., & Birkenstein, C. (2006). *They say, I say: The moves that matter in academic writing*. New York: Norton.

Graves, M. F. (2006). *The vocabulary book: Learning and instruction*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hillocks, G. (2002). *The testing trap: How state writing assessments control writing*. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Marzano, R. J. & Pickering, D. J. (2005). *Building academic vocabulary: Teacher's manual*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Nagy, W.E. (1988). *Teaching vocabulary to improve reading comprehension*. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Scarborough, H.S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook for research in early literacy*, pp. 97 – 110. New York: Guilford.

Stone, R. (1999). *Ordinary words*. Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press.

Reviewed by Bryan Ripley Crandall, Ph.D. student in English Education at Syracuse University. He taught at the J. Graham Brown School in Louisville, Kentucky where he was a Louisville Writing Project participant and a Bread Loaf School of English Kentucky fellow.

Groves, Malcom. (2008). *Regenerating Schools: Leading Transformation of Standards and Services through Community Engagement.* New York: Continuum International Publishing.

Pages: 200 Price: $49.95 ISBN: 978-1-85539-457-5

Regenerating Schools will lift you out of your comfort zone regarding what education is or should be. Without entirely denouncing traditional approaches to education and (more accurately) schooling, Groves suggests how such current pedagogical practices can be expanded upon and morphed into something that more directly, more holistically, and more comprehensively aids both the learner and the community in which that learner will forever live. This, Groves argues, can be thought of as expanding on Robert Putnam's idea of 'social capital' (2000) by building networks, enhancing community-wide communication, and preparing learners to successfully live in their world by instilling in them knowledge and skills that are transferable not only indirectly, but also directly, since the learning necessarily takes place within the context of the 'outside world' itself.

This is not, however, to discount the value of traditional schooling, which is not always "fun." Textbooks, for example, have a definite value and a rightful place in our educational system. Algebra lessons should not be neglected, and are best taught in a more traditional setting. However, Groves recognizes that so much of a 'regenerated school' is not solely about the actual lesson, but is also about the community engagement that goes into developing the pedagogical practices, and also about the ethos of the school in general. That is, the culture or climate of the school, its learners, its teachers, and its community all need to be in sync, to understand and value a united pedagogical, community, and worldly philosophy about what education means for its learners and for its community, not only in the future, but also in the present. There is a continuing symbiotic relationship between these learners and their community, and Groves does well to recognize this and place it at the heart of his book.

Any discussion about a redefinition of education, however, would be moot without an accompanying discussion of the definition(s) of intelligence. While intelligence is often thought of as IQ, or intelligence quotient, the two are far from

equitable. There has been a longstanding difficulty in defining intelligence, and therefore controversy about how to measure it. Therefore, as Groves rightly notes, the typical ways that schools presume to indirectly measure students' intelligence (via academic performance) is entirely inadequate, and therefore he devotes a chapter to the concept of emotional intelligence (EI). Groves should be commended for doing this, since EI (should it exist) is inextricably intertwined with regenerated schools, as a sort of social intelligence. However, considering EI may be one of the things at the heart of regenerated schools, Groves does not devote enough space to thoughtfully and comprehensively considering the construct. For instance, there has been great controversy in the literature regarding the measurement of EI, the nature of the construct itself, and even whether EI exists. Groves would have done well to address these issues.

There is another issue that seems to have been overlooked, and it is a central one: *Are students ready for this?* The ready answer, of course, is to respond in the affirmative, maybe even to argue that we have been underestimating today's youth when it comes to education. Personally, I think that we have been underestimating them. Whether or not they are ready for this, however, is another question. Undoubtedly, many of them are ready to be leaders within their communities and are ready to be involved in the planning of such school-community relationships, as Groves rightly suggests. For regeneration such as that which Groves proposes, however, all students need to be ready for it, as any that are not ready are susceptible to falling through the cracks in a system that allows them to own their (albeit personalized) education, just as they are falling through the cracks in the present system that delivers their education to them. We need a delicate balance in any system that is to successfully educate with in wide range of student ability, passion, curiosity, and self-directedness. *Are students ready?* Are *all* students ready?

To this end, however, Groves does well to emphasize that the context matters, and that what is an appropriately regenerated school in one area would be unfitting in a different area of the world. Therefore, to have a handbook, per se, for what a 'regenerated school' is, would necessarily defeat the purpose of a school involved in its community and surrounding environment. Likewise, Groves does not jump immediately into change unprepared. He does well to provide a lot of governmental history and background regarding the educational system, and this gives readers a knowledge base in order to broaden their appreciation of the educational system – not only where it is, but also where it has been, where it is going, and how it has progressed thus far. This aspect of the book, however, is limited to a British audience and therefore may not be applicable for readers from other nations. If the book is ideally targeted toward individuals in a variety of countries, as it presumably is, a similar background for a variety of countries' respective educational systems would add substantial value to the book.

In the US, at least, this book comes at a revolutionary time in history, and hopefully also an innovative time in the history of US education. Regardless of one's political affiliation or preference, one cannot deny that President Obama is proposing to bring fresh insight and out-of-the-box thinking to the education system. In particular, Obama has proposed a system in which learners will be able to fund their education at least partially via service to their communities. Obviously, this has important differences with what Groves is proposing. Specifically, Groves proposes that the community involvement is a part of the education itself, whereas Obama suggests that the community involvement would be merely a stepping stone on which many learners will need to tread if they are to then land on the shore of schooling. Nevertheless, despite this fundamental difference between the two plans, Obama's foresight into educational innovation and his recognition of the importance of community involvement is an important first step to further change as proposed by Groves.

It is first steps such as these that are necessary if Groves' plans are to be seen as plausible. Service learning has increased in recent years, an important indication that teachers and school systems are increasingly recognizing the value of learners' community involvement. This is another crucial first step for school systems that question the feasibility of Groves' plan. The measurement of such over-arching, long-term, humanistic objectives is one qualm that can easily be seen. Groves does an excellent job of outlining various ways in which such outcomes might be measured, however problems still exist, including 1) the fact that such qualitative outcomes will likely be measured quantitatively, and 2) the need for both a large financial and also a longitudinal commitment on the part of the school systems seeking to measure these outcomes. Measuring these outcomes will not be easy, will not come cheaply, and they may not come for some time after the initial implementation of a regeneration plan. Patience will be required.

Given these aforementioned issues, is Groves' plan too idealistic? Maybe not. He provides a comprehensive discussion of important issues, presented in a clear and reader- friendly manner. He brings in relevant outside concepts such as learning organizations where appropriate, and discusses what the regenerating school might learn from them. He recognizes the importance of engaged and responsible citizenship in the context of the changing world around us, including the changing workforce into which students will soon be traveling. Nevertheless, the book is oftentimes repetitious, and this redundancy detracts somewhat from the book's ability to hold the reader's attention and enthusiasm.

Finally, as further evidence that his plan may not be impossibly idealistic, Groves provides detailed explanations of various 'change studies' that add to the book's richness and provide concrete ideas for practitioners not necessarily to mimic, but which should at least spur further out-of-the-box, into-the-real-world thinking. While it is important to remember that these are case studies and are thus susceptible to the many limitations of case studies, they go to show that, sometimes, in some places, Groves' plan has been put into action. It is important to remember, however, that, as Groves asserts, culture change is at the heart of this. Regeneration is impossible without the commitment of the learners, the (formal) educators, and the community (which I will call the informal educator). Culture change is difficult, and it takes a long time. This cannot happen overnight, so, once again, patience, commitment, and faith in the system are required. Groves clearly possesses this. He has a passion for a comprehensive and fulfilling education for all students, and this in itself is noteworthy, as it is unfortunately a passion that has been drained out of so many burned- out academicians in the traditional school system.

References

Putnam, Robert D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Reviewed by Maura Mills, a doctoral candidate at Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas. Ms. Mills is also an adjunct instructor at Highland Community College, and a rater for the Indiana University Northwest Assessment Center.

Gurian, Michael, Stevens, Kathy, & King, Kelley. (2008). *Strategies for Teaching Boys & Girls: Elementary Level, Grades PreK-5.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pages: 200 Price: $29.95 ISBN: 978-0-7879-9730-4

Strategies for Teaching Boys and Girls offers a helpful resource to elementary school teachers and parents on boosting the dynamics of the student-teacher-parent relationship. The material is based on the research and training provided by the Gurian Institute, led by the primary author of the book.

The authors set gender differences as the major framework for the book and present their suggestions accordingly. Although the book is written as a reference guide and does not need to be read in any particular order, Gurian, Stevens, & King suggest that readers start with the first chapter, "The Science of Boy-Girl Learning Differences," in order to understand their underlying ideas.

Each of the following chapters focuses on a different aspect of child development and includes general, as well as specific ideas for implementing activities to support appropriate growth in children. There seems to be no particular order for the compilation of chapter topics. Gurian et al. include topics such as, physical activities, visual learning strategies, learner empowerment, group work, and the use of art and music. The last chapter, entitled "The Home Stretch," is devoted to the importance of parental involvement and cooperation between parents and teachers.

The audience may find Chapter 8, "Connecting with Your Students," of particular significance. It provides helpful strategies on how to really connect with students. Although the teacher-student relationship often remains rather formal within the American school system, the authors offer a variety of suggestions of how to build a strong bond with students. A brief chart on the value of the teacher-student connection among different cultures around the world presents a special perspective to educators on the significance of such a connection. The chapter also provides an extensive list of self-reflective and classroom activities that teachers can implement in order to strengthen their bond with students.

Additionally, the authors talk about deficiencies in some school district curricula due to their focus on mathematics, science, and reading, as a result of No Child Left Behind and other governmental initiatives. Such deficiencies take away from the development of arts, which inhibit young children from appropriate holistic development. The authors emphasize the significance of art activities for young children (p. 137).

The book is written in an easily readable format. It includes samples of the students' work and description of particular case studies. The material often incorporates bulleted lists and graphical organizers in the margins. Although there are no in-text citations, the authors provide the list of research titles used in each of the chapters at the end of the book.

The scholarly community might find this book too simplistic. However, the intended audience of elementary school teachers and parents will easily comprehend the writing style and be able to implement the provided strategies to enhance the development of young children.

Reviewed by Kira Gulko Morse, a doctoral candidate, Department of Bilingual Education, Texas A&M University - Kingsville.

Janney, Rachel and Snell, Martha E. (2008). *Behavioral Support: Second Edition.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Pages: 171 Price: $26.95 ISBN: 978-1-55766-911-7

This book is targeted at teachers working to educate children with learning and behavioural problems in inclusive schools. However, the incisive comments of Janney and Snell on behavioural support will be of use to educators of young people in any field and at any level, whether working with individual children or developing whole-school behavioural support policies. The book's major success is in making a particular body of complex research accessible and then moving the reader to think about how the findings from these studies can be applied in the classroom in a practical way.

The book opens by outlining an approach to behaviour management known as positive behavioural support (PBS). The focus of PBS is not to chastise problem behaviour, but to teach new behaviours that help students communicate their needs and achieve what they want in a different, socially-valued way. It is argued that in many cases children who exhibit problem behaviours have unintentionally been taught that these are effective ways to achieve their aims. Fortunately, central to PBS is the view that behaviour is learned and as such can be changed. The PBS approach relies on observation of an individual's behaviour, in which a functional behavioural assessment (FBA) is completed. FBAs can involve a variety of data-gathering techniques from indirect methods, such as interviews, to direct methods in which the behaviour of a child is observed before and after an intervention to identify patterns in behaviour. The purpose of an FBA is to analyse "relationships among the behaviour, the conditions in the environment that precede it, and the ways the behaviour is reinforced [to] reveal the purpose of the behaviour" (p. 7). Once the purpose of the behaviour is identified, replacement behaviours are taught.

Chapter 2 discusses behavioural support techniques that can be applied to the whole school. Effective schoolwide behavioural support systems are well-defined, communicated to everyone linked to the school, and consistent. Having identified a range of effective schoolwide PBS systems, Janney and Snell detail a generic approach to schoolwide behavioural support based on their research. This involves a stepped approach that starts with the establishment of a leadership team and the securing of schoolwide agreements and supports, the development of a data-based action plan, the arrangement for accurate implementation and then the conducting of formative data-based monitoring. Included in this chapter is a wealth of material on change management. The level of practical assistance offered here and throughout the book goes into such depth as to offering advice on the practicalities of how to get meetings to work.

The authors then consider those students at risk of behavioural problems who do not warrant the intensive level of intervention outlined in later chapters, but are likely to exhibit more serious behaviour problems if not given support. After outlining methods to locate these students, the book goes on to describe a range of selected interventions. Although these individuals are often not a priority as they may not exhibit such challenging behaviour, it is argued that "further prevention efforts are imperative to the future mental health and well-being of students whose behaviour difficulties cannot be remediated through universal, schoolwide interventions" (p. 54).

The final two chapters, the most substantive in this book, discuss PBS in relation to those students whose behaviour is deemed seriously disruptive or destructive. Usually classified as having emotional or behavioural disorders, or cognitive disabilities, the behaviour of these students rarely improves in response to schoolwide interventions. Chapter 4 outlines the first steps of a method to use PBS for these individual students. This involves identifying and prioritising the problems, and if necessary making a safety plan for the student. Once this is done the FBA should be conducted, which involves gathering information, direct observations and the construction of hypothesis statements. The construction of the FBA may at some stage involve the student being unconditionally given what they want, to see if it eliminates the problem behaviour. However, the authors are quick to note that "this is not the solution to the behaviour problem. This is a specific context that has been set up in order to demonstrate quickly the controlling factors for the behaviour" (p. 94).

Chapter 5 details how the PBS should be designed, implemented and evaluated. An intervention plan should be designed in light of the findings from the FBA and should seek to make the,

> problem behaviour irrelevant, ineffective, and inefficient in serving its function. At the same time the environment is altered to avoid the need to use the problem behaviour, and the new, alternative behaviour becomes the most effective and efficient way to achieve the purpose that was served by the problem behaviour (p. 99- 101).

Janney and Snell offer a series of practical examples of replacement behaviours that serve different functions, in all of which the reinforcing consequences that were maintaining the problem behaviour are changed to reinforce the replacement behaviour. Noting that "No one knows exactly what the minimum requirements are for effective interventions for significant behaviour problems", the authors urge the readers to conduct formal ongoing data collection and analysis to inform the behaviour support plan for the student in question and future PBS programmes (p. 117).

Although the authors regularly note that an FBA "should not be conducted without the guidance of a qualified specialist" (p. 72), and that behavioural support plans for particularly dangerous or destructive problems may require the assistance of expert consultants, they argue that teams that have had "relatively modest amounts of in- service training in the assessment, planning, and intervention processes ... can create and implement supports that efficiently and effectively enable the student to make meaningful improvements" (p. 126). They note that the biggest challenge in PBS approaches is moving away from a model of behavioural support that is based on reactive, as opposed to proactive interventions.

As the authors themselves make clear, PBS is not a panacea as many problem behaviours may be the result of factors that PBS cannot resolve (e.g. physiological factors). However, the approach outlined in this book is one with which every teacher should be familiar. For this reader the most impressive aspect of this book was the care the authors took to ensure that all aspects of their model of behavioural support were based on research demonstrating both its theoretical validity and practical efficacy, outlined in an accessible manner in the brief 'What the Research Says' sections. Every chapter is supported by in-depth case studies, or 'student snapshots', to exemplify particular points. Finally, the book is supported by an appendix containing more than 20 pages of blank worksheets to support the particular interventions outlined in the text (with examples in the text of how these sheets should be filled in) and a comprehensive bibliography for further information on this approach. In short, this is an excellent, clearly written book which should enrich the practice of teachers at every level.

Reviewed by Dr Geoff Baker, Academic Advisor, Centre for Integrative Learning, University of Nottingham, UK.

Leader, Gerald C. & Stern, Amy F. (2008). *Real Leaders, Real Schools: Stories of Success against Enormous Odds.* Cambridge: MA Harvard Educaton Press.

Pages: 244 Price: $26.95 ISBN: 978-1-891792-96-0

Real Leaders, Real Schools: Stories of Success against Enormous Odds describes the educational reforms instituted by five school principals from the Boston Public Schools. They all demonstrated unique leadership styles and used a variety of strategies that worked in successfully improving the academic achievement of their students from disadvantaged environments. These principals' actions were responses to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System as a result of the Education Reform Act in 1993, legislation that was purported to be more demanding than that of the No Child

Left Behind legislation of 2002. These five principals had a common belief that schools could make a difference to children. The book contains six chapters. The first five describe how each principal carried out her or his school's reforms. The last chapter synthesizes the findings from their experiences. Each principal wanted her/his real name and their school's name used in this book.

Casel Walker, principal of the Joseph P. Manning Elementary School described in chapter 1, was one of the newer staff in the school. She came to the school with fresh child- focused eyes, and wanted the teachers to see things from a different perspective. She constantly pointed out discrepancies to the staff, often using quantitative data to support her findings. For example, only students of color were identified as needing extra help, kindergarten was segregated from the rest of the school, not all parents were attending council meetings due to their work schedules, the library occupied the smallest room in the building, and computers were centralized in one room with one specialist teacher. One of her riskiest actions was to eliminate the special education program and institute a Learning Adaptive Behaviour program which allowed her to bring in new staff, have others trained, and obtain more resources. This program, dealing with really tough kids, compelled teachers to look at everything, including the curriculum, the programs, and the delivery of reading and mathematics in the school. The results were positive: more community involvement in the school, more and different programs, and teachers who were much more proactive and supportive of Walker's child-focused approach.

Chapter 2 describes the work of Kim Marshall, principal of Mather Elementary School. Marshall was an innovator. He moved the teachers slowly and sometimes reluctantly over the years from uncritical and haphazard teaching to developing both rubrics and an integrated elementary school curriculum. Marshall believed in goals and mission statements. He instituted SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, results- oriented, and time-bound) for every subject at every grade level. The teachers made huge changes and the students' results improved dramatically, "making the largest gain in their scores of any large-sized elementary school in their state" (p. 66). Marshall believed that he was not successful in getting teachers to use assessments to track how well the SMART goals were met. He thought that another principal with another skill set was required to continue the movement for school improvement.

Muriel Leonard's work as principal of the Shaw Middle School comprises chapter 3. Her reputation was as a hands-on administrator and a "formidable change- maker" (p. 70) who demanded excellence but who supported her staff. The school had a history of poor academic results, a lack of discipline, and teachers who seemed defeated and lacked involvement. "It was a school in chaos," (p. 71). Some teachers had even given grades based on student behavior rather than performance. The worst class, English, was the one the principal took over to teach. She informed the students of her expectations, provided extra support after school, and gave them every opportunity to succeed. In this way, she developed an "effort-based culture" (p. 73). She said her role was to challenge teachers, not just to evaluate them, so teachers would take responsibility for improving their own instructional practice. When asked, she came, observed their classes, and gave feedback. The teachers who resisted this approach left the school, allowing Muriel to hire new teachers who were instilled with the culture of putting in extra effort to help students succeed. She pushed the staff over the years to create more extra-curricular opportunities for students. Furthermore, Leonard got financial support for its improvement plans for whole school improvement. Improvement/planning teams developed and a new structure was suggested (from five to four periods per day). Rubrics were developed across all subject areas and at every grade level. Many teams were at work and an overall leadership team (described in a somewhat cumbersome and complicated flow-chart) was put into place as a new self-governance structure. It was this team that constructed an agreed-upon vision for the school. Next, Leonard tackled the curriculum having colleagues critically examine lesson plans. Simultaneously, work was underway to engage families more in the school and in their child's work. Then the planning teams worked on student motivation, by requiring that all students complete a project up to acceptable standards before they were given a pass in that grade; also the students had to maintain an overall C average to be eligible to participate in extra-curricular activities.

Chapter 4 describes Michael Fung, principal of the Charlestown High School. He was an unexpected choice as principal, with a background of business and education experience. He was an entrepreneur and took risks. Fung also believed that making a major change caused as much furor as making a minor one, so why not make a major one. Immediately he articulated his goal of raising student test scores on the Stanford 9 to a level 2 (partial mastery of fundamental skills). Next he reworked the design of the school into "six independent mini-schools, each with a shared vision and common purpose" (p. 108), grouping teachers and their classrooms into the same area of the school and allowing them common planning time. His second structural change was to have a two- tiered structure: a lower school (grades 9 and 10) and an upper school (grades 11 and 12). Students in the lower school would concentrate on the foundational subjects of English, mathematics, social studies, and sciences. The upper school would focus on giving students pathways to different careers, where projects and portfolio-based approaches were used. Getting resistance from the more senior teachers who taught primarily in the upper school, he focused his efforts more on the lower school where he hired new and young teachers, mentored them and even warned them of the older more reluctant older teachers, and provided additional resources. "Bringing in new staff is [the best way] to try and create a new culture" (p. 138). One of the units produced exemplary student results. That unit also developed and enforced a strict discipline and attendance policy. Those teachers went on to develop a common curriculum aligned to the board's and state's goals, compulsory homework, and two-hour academic after-school program where they taught either English or mathematics. The scores of the 10th grade classes rose; unfortunately, "the education of the eleventh and twelfth graders …languished" (p. 138).

Chapter 5 describes Kathleen Flannery's principalship at Edward Everett Elementary School. She was an experienced educational administrator and an instructional leader who wanted to show the teachers first what she could do for them, before trying to effect change in them. While the teachers were committed and hard working, many of their teaching strategies were out-dated. Flannery spent much of her first listening. However she did implement a morning memo in order to keep all teachers informed equally. Working with the teachers, she facilitated a more comprehensive reading program which kept students in their regular classes. She also worked hard to hire more teachers of color so the teaching staff was more representative of the students. Flannery worked through her teachers knowing that it takes time to build strong relationships. She moved the staff to embrace constructivism, set the bar in the school board for providing formative

feedback to teachers through regular classroom visits, and moved the reluctant staff toward grade-level common planning time and more integrated curricula. The goal was to allow the teachers to obtain feedback from their colleagues "about changing instruction to increase student achievement" (p. 166). Also, she involved parents by using Home Reading contracts and sending a weekly newsletter home. Her ways of working with non-English speaking parents where quite resourceful, but unfortunately resulted in white parents feeling somewhat left out. Flannery knew the teachers of Everett were concerned about their students, but also knew that real sustained change came from within the staff.

Chapter 6, the final chapter, summarizes the leadership practices that these five principals used. All were chosen by the authors because they contributed to increases in student achievement. They all believed that every student can learn and that the school can help bring about a positive improvement in academic achievement. They all contributed to helping teachers identify and reduce achievement gaps using data-driven decision-making. They all were instructional leaders, not solely building managers. All principals were sensitive to the existing school culture, but all succeeded in creating in the staff a desire for reform and then helping them facilitate reform. All five principals worked diligently to improve the quality of instruction which meant selectively hiring qualified staff, making frequent visits to classrooms, and providing formative feedback to staff. All principals helped to make their staff professional learning communities (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006). Each was described as having won the trust of the majority of their staff, and getting their support for the proposed goals. Every principal made concerted efforts to actively engage parents in school activities and in student learning. Finally, all five principals demonstrated, according to the authors, the behaviors that research (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005) has identified as correlating with student academic achievement.

In all, this is a very interesting, readable, and useful book. I believe that each of the first five chapters could be read/used alone as a case study to help future and current school leaders gain insight into the working lives of other principals. In its entirety, the book could be used as a text in a graded course on educational leadership or a principals' professional development program. Burgeoning leaders should know that change requires a vision, but also much patience, perseverance, and hard work on the part of the principal. These exemplary principals demonstrated their belief and faith in both their teachers and the students, and that all are capable of achieving when provided with the right ingredients.

References

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2006). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Marzano, R.J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B.A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Reviewed by Ruth Rees, PhD, Professor, Faculty of Education, Queen's University, Kingston, ON Canada

---

Lesch, Lyn . (2008). *How to Prepare Students for the Information Age and Global Marketplace.* Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Pages: 139 Price: $19.95 ISBN: 978-1-57886-696-0

Despite the promise of the book's title, this is not a how-to manual. Overall it can best be classified as a topical, exploratory discussion. While timely, there is little here of a practical nature for educators who seek to prepare students in the 21st century.

The basic premise of the book is that students should be guided toward making interdisciplinary connections among disparate ideas of their own choosing. Lesch offers the following expertise from his 12 years experience as founder and director of a private school in Evanston, Illinois.

> For in an age in which everyone is increasingly gaining access to the same information, the person who can employ that information to re-imagine specific problems or entire areas of concern in the most creative manner possible is inevitably going to be the most successful (p. 3).

The book consists of 12 chapters, each providing a very broad educational context for the approach to learning that Lesch advocates: 1) "Learning in the Information Age", 2) "A New Paradigm", 3) "Learning How to Learn", 4) "Information, Knowledge and Learning", 5) "Changes in the Modern Classroom", 6) "Paths of Learning", 7) "Teacher and Student", 8) "New Skills for the information Age", 9) "A Different Accountability", 10) "Seamless Education", 11) "The Role of Parents" and 12) "The Future of Schooling".

How to Prepare Students for the Information Age and Global Marketplace, is yet another call for school reform. The "global" spin promises to make it timely and pertinent, but in substance it is a thin coat of new paint on already widely accepted constructivist theories of education. Missing is the theoretical groundwork that could have so easily been provided. Nor is any evidence presented that the approach advocated throughout the text would improve student learning. Lesch's overall point that students need to learn more creatively is well taken, but the reader can easily grasp the gist of what he has to say in the first chapter or two, thus avoiding the repetition of this idea throughout the book.

It is difficult to imagine the publisher's intended audience. The book lacks a reference list or index, and so is of limited scholarly use. The ideas presented are intriguing, but lack details about how they might actually be implemented. Despite Lesch's classroom and administrative experience, not much is offered by way of solutions to significant problems. In fact, speaking as a professional teacher with more than 10 years experience in public schools, I found Lesch's casual dismissal

of obstacles such as scheduling and accountability insulting to the countless teachers who are successful in creatively guiding students within practical constraints.

For example, in one of the most interesting chapters of the book, Lesch makes a compelling case for a new accountability that emphasizes the learning process over subject matter. Yet, he offers no insight into how such a system might be implemented. In fact, he concludes the chapter by stating the obvious problem without offering any solutions.

> …students are tested to see how well they acquire certain skills and subject matter. Then, because school funding and teacher accountability become so inextricably linked with the results of these tests, the scores become actually more important than how the tests can be employed to diagnose how young people can be effectively assisted with their learning. So, particularly with the issue of facilitating creativity and initiative in our students, it would seem to be highly important that this does not occur (p. 91).

This type of statement acknowledging the significant barriers to implementing a more creative curriculum, without offering solutions occurs frequently throughout the book, and is likely to frustrate most serious readers.

Those seeking a practical, evidence-based handbook for teaching and learning in the information age would be better served by *Guided Learning: Learning in the 21st Century* (Kuhlthau, Maniotes and Caspari, 2007).

References

Kuhlthau, C., Maniotes, L.K. & Caspari, A.K. (2007). *Guided learning: Learning in the 21st century*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Reviewed by Beth A. McDonough, an education librarian and doctoral student in education at Western Carolina University. She is nationally-board certified in school library media, with more than ten years experience in the public schools.

National Center on Education and the Economy (2008). *Tough Choices or Tough Times: The Report of The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, Revised and Expanded.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pages: 264 Price: $22.95 ISBN: 978-0-470-26756-1

In today's current climate, the effects of globalization are undeniable. Within education specifically, international attention is often given to standardized examination benchmark scores and related trends of a country's economic growth. As a result of this increasing focus, the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (or "the Commission") has created the report *Tough Choices or Tough Times*.

The Commission's report has one central, driving belief: American education must improve relative to other nations in order to keep the American standard of living steady. In *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, the Commission makes the case that our country is not prepared to succeed in today's competitive knowledge-based, global economy. As a result, American workers will experience a long-term decline in their earning power and the American economy will collapse. This can be avoided, however, if we fix the problems plaguing public education.

Specifically, the Commission argues that the American standard of living will decrease if our current workforce does not learn the necessary skills for a global economy. The Commission believes that our country is losing the education race globally and, as a result, will lose its economic footing. The report consists of three central parts: part one explains the crucial nature of the problem, part two lists recommendations to solve the problem, and part three provides background papers on a variety of issues linked to the report.

Part one paints a dismal picture of America's current predicament. Although the standards-based education movement gained support, the Commission states that the United States "failed to ask what it would take, beyond standards and accountability measures, to radically improve student performance without radically increasing what it was willing to spend" (p. 4). Despite the rising costs of schooling, achievement has not improved. Meanwhile, competing countries such as China and India are producing more students with higher skill sets in more demanding career fields. With the new standard practice of outsourcing and the increase of routine work being done by machines and people who charge low prices, the Commission claims that Americans will only maintain their standard of living through creativity and innovation: "The crucial new factor, the one that alone can justify higher wages in this country than in other countries with similar levels of cognitive skills, is creativity and innovation" (p. 29).

Part two outlines a plan that includes a list of recommendations to overhaul public education. First, the Commission proposes a standardized assessment system called the State Board Qualifying Examinations. Every student in the country will follow the same syllabus for core subjects and take high-stakes exams to demonstrate mastery. Varying scale scores would lead to several different educational opportunities for qualifying students.

Second, states would change state laws in the recruitment, licensing, employment, compensation, tenure, and retention of teachers. Major changes would include a "front-loaded" system where higher compensation would be given earlier in a teacher's career, a new Teacher Development Agency where performance contracts are made with different organizations that want to train teachers, and a recruiting strategy that targets the top third of all high school graduates going to college.

Third, the Commission proposes that school districts manage “contract schools.” These schools would be run by organizations solely contracted by school districts and would be affiliated with a state-approved network. These schools would be completely funded by, and report directly to, the state. These schools would have more autonomy but greater accountability.

Next the Commission proposes an increase in the number of services provided for 3- and 4- year-olds, as well as the redesign of schools serving struggling students. Students who need the most support would receive social, psychological, and academic services throughout their public schooling career. Finally, the Commission addresses the lack of skills in America’s current adult workforce by recommending the increase of adult educational services, as well as the creation of educational vouchers for adult learners.

In conclusion, the Commission argues that America needs to better educate its current and future employees. In order to do that, they call for a complete overhaul of the current education system. Their recommendations have been employed by several states and there is data to suggest varying levels of improvement (see the overwhelming number of background papers in Part three). Overall, Tough Choices or Tough Times is an interesting read with a unique perspective on how to tackle the American education crisis. School administrators and policy-makers will find much to consider here.

Reviewed by Jade Caines, Emory University.

O’Connor, Ken. (2007). *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades.* Portland, OR: Educational Testing Service.

Pages: 125 Price: $28.00 ISBN: 978-0-9655101-8-9

A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 fixes for Broken Grades, by Ken O’Connor (2007), brings the discussion of grading and the role grades play in the classroom to the forefront of the debate about proper educational practice. The author discusses the need for all educational professionals to develop an understanding of the true communicative nature of grades and how to effectively use grades to truly assess student understanding of a topic. Ken O’Connor, former Curriculum Coordinator for the Scarborough Board of Education and author of *How to Grade for Learning, Linking Grades to Standards* (2002), urges educators to develop and implement grading systems within the classroom that are reflective of what students have actually learned. In addition, O’Connor calls for grading to be based strictly on achievement and tied to local standards. In essence, the author develops an argument for criterion-based grading by educational practitioners.

To understand how grading can be viewed as an inexact measure of student achievement, one must understand the context in which practitioners operate. Every state in the United States (except Iowa) and every province in Canada, and every jurisdiction in most other countries now have educational content standards tied to expected outcomes for learning (p. 3). O’Connor uses Biggs’ 1999 outline to explain his call for alignment between learning activities and assessments to local and regional standards.

O’Connor asks some seemingly simple questions, “How confident am I that the grades students get in my classroom/school/district are consistent, accurate and meaningful, and that they are supporting learning?”, and “How confident am I that the grades I assign students accurately reflect my school’s/district’s published content standards and desired learning outcomes?” (p. 3). These questions become very difficult to answer when viewed through the lens of educational reform and current policy. Often policy is unclear, misinterpreted or simply not followed (Sadler, 2005).

In six chapters over 118 pages, O’Connor takes the educational professional through fifteen fixes which align grading with standards and actual student achievement. The underlying theme throughout each chapter is to separate achievement on assessments from other classroom practices designed to modify behavior. “Grades are broken when they do not accurately communicate achievement. The fix for this is to make grades as pure a measure as possible of student’s achievement; that is, make them reflect only student performance in mastering…published learning goals.” (p. 19).

The strongest aspect of the book is the ability of the author to define his vision of grading and its place in the classroom for the educational professional. O’Connor easily compiles a list of 15 fixes for broken grades. The definition of grade and assessment become interwoven into each of the fixes. This attention to each of the fixes allows the author to explore some of the underlying issues of fairness, motivation, objectivity and professional judgment in grading (p. 9). The remainder of the book outlines the suggested steps that educational professionals should take to “fix broken grades”. The book culminates with the suggestion that “Teacher, schools and districts need to examine their grading procedure and policies to see if they “fit” with what is expected in standards-based systems” (p. 118).

To accomplish this, the author draws heavily on a relatively narrow set of research papers in the education and educational policy literature. However, the author fails to develop a picture of contradictory research and does not outline the weaknesses of his approach. O’Connor substitutes the lack of researcher based references with anecdotal evidence collected during frequent seminars and newspaper interviews of which he has been a part.

Some recommendations found in the book do not seem to demonstrate an understanding of the complexity of the current classroom environment. The author fails to address the topics of fairness, motivation and professional judgment while stating they are the underpinnings of grading. This lack of the understanding of practice is exemplified by statements such; “Grades are broken when they include penalties for student work submitted late.” (p. 26). The author suggests not penalizing students grades by reducing the grade however then suggests that an “A+ paper submitted several days late be recorded as an A-.”(p. 29). These statements are indicative of the confused nature of the book as the author suggests one practice, then

within the same chapter offers a second contradicting suggested practice. The author also fails to address how to effectively integrate behavioral outcomes in the classroom. Instead, he suggests addressing the behavior though administrative rather than teaching channels. The prescribed practice by the author does not take into account research which suggests one possible way to accomplish this is through clear indications and statements of intent with clear terminal behavior outcomes through which the students can have criterion-based assessment assigned (Mager, 1962; Norris, 2006).

The book continues to fail by not developing an effective implementation plan for the educational professional in the classroom. To further compound the problem in implementation of the "fixes", the author often summarily separates current grading practices with proposed grading practices through semantics. This is noted in the author's suggestion, "The fix for this is to not use extra-credit (work) or bonus points. If the student wants to get higher grades, the teacher can require them to provide "extra" evidence that demonstrates a higher level of achievement." (p. 31).

A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades brings to light several current issues in our school system and opens the door for discussion of needed reform in education. The book also attempts to align grading (criterion-based grading) with standards-based education, however; the book fails to effectively deliver a practical implementation and framework to accomplish its goal. The author outlines several steps to develop a truly standards-based grading (criterion-based) system but only pays lip- service to the classroom educators and practical concerns in the process. With a deeper review of current research the author would find that there is still considerable debate. "The analysis shows that there is no common understanding of what criteria-based means or what it implies for practice. This has inhibited high-quality discourse, research and development among scholars and practitioners." (Sadler, 2005, p. 175).

References

Biggs, J. (1999) *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Mager, R. F. (1962) *Preparing instructional objectives*. Belmont, CA: Fearon.

Norris, J. M., (2006). The why (and how) of assessing student learning outcomes in college foreign language programs. *The Modern Language Journal, 90*(4), 576-583.

O'Connor, K. (1999). *How to grade for learning: Linking grades to standards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Sadler, D. (2005) Interpretations of criteria-based assessment and grading in higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 30*(2), 175-194.

Reviewed by Richard Lamb, a Ph.D. student in the Science Education Program at North Carolina State University. His research interests include technology integration into the science classroom, teacher education as well as educational policy.

Provenzo Jr., Eugene F. (2009). *Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Pages: 1296 Price: $385.00 ISBN: 9781412906784

The Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education contains over 400 entries on topics related to the "foundations of education" --a broadly- defined, sweepingly-interdisciplinary field of study which examines the evolution of education and the roles of education in society by drawing from a myriad of academic disciplines including sociology, history, political science, and economics. The multifarious, some might say schizophrenic, nature of the discipline is, in the words of the editor, "reflected in the unusual range of articles found in this encyclopedia … [whose] diverse content and methodological arguments reflect the divisions or 'fault lines' within the field" (p. 963). This diversity is reflected in the content where broad categories such as curriculum, school governance and multiculturalism include articles such as "Drug Education", "Busing", and "White Privilege".

According to a prominent researcher in the field of social foundations of education, schools act as "agents of cultural and ideological hegemony," (Apple, 2004, p. 5) and educators should seek to uncover the latent ideological content of school curriculums in an attempt to "understand the complex interrelationships that exist between schools and aspects of cultural as well as economic [Ideological Reproduction]" (Apple, 2004, p.23). *The Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education* explores these complex interrelationships by identifying and defining cultural phenomena which continue to shape education in America. Eugene F Provenzo Jr., the principal editor of the encyclopedia, argues that the greatest failure of teacher education in the United States is its reluctance to address cultural questions and its inability to train teachers to reflect on the cultural influences at play in their classrooms (p. 994). *The Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education* seeks to assuage this perceived failure by addressing large and largely philosophical themes like sexuality, gender, multiculturalism, religion, equality, hegemony, and social stratification.

The Encyclopedia of Cultural and Social Foundations of Education presents schools as complex and multifaceted systems that reflect the social, cultural, and political forces at work in society, and proponents of foundational studies argue that a multidisciplinary approach is necessary given the inherent complexity of the educational system. Many scholars disagree, preferring a more pragmatic approach to education. Ultimately, any determination of the merits of this set will depend on the reader's estimations of the relative worth of interdisciplinary study compared to more traditional, disciplinary modes of inquiry. In fact, the same criticisms which have been leveled at the social foundations of education model since its inception

in the 1930s can be applied to this set of books. If you believe, as James Bryant Conant (1963) did, that cultural studies and “eclectic foundations courses” are too broadly defined and lacking the depth necessary for students to “gain an understanding and appreciation of the material presented,” (p. 130) you will likely find The Encyclopedia of Cultural and Social Foundations of Education to be discontinuous, fractional, and conceptually nebulous. If, on the other hand, you believe, as the editor of this set does, that, given the inherent complexity of the educational system, “a singular disciplinary model is inadequate for the field of education” (Provenzo, p. 979), then you may find this set to be a valuable resource.

The descriptive and analytical articles contained in this set, while wildly varied in concept and theme, are of consistently good quality. Topics are presented in survey articles written by scholars and expert practitioners, each of which defines an issue or idea pertaining to the social, cultural, or pedagogical development of education in the United States. Beyond simply defining terms, however, *The Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education* does an excellent job of delivering on the “So-What-Factor” by explaining not only the concept, but also its relationship to and implications for the discipline of foundations of education. Bibliographies and suggestions for future reading presented at the end of each article are generally appropriate and widely available, making *The Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education* a great research starting point.

Each of the three volumes of *The Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education* begins with a reader’s guide which is a useful way-finding tool which divides all of the entries into one or more categories. Each of the dozen or so categories, determined by the editor to be representative of the major branches of the discipline, are anchored by one extensive article (approximately 5,000 words) and supported by several related, subordinate, or supportive articles. The third and final volume of the set contains a smattering of miscellaneous items including a series of biographies of notable educators, a rich collection of visual materials (which, perhaps, would have more impact were the pictures aligned with relevant articles), a comprehensive index, and a lengthy essay by the editor which seeks to summarize, justify, and redefine the field of study.

This encyclopedia set is ideal for college libraries in institutions which support programs or courses of study relating to the historical, social, or cultural foundations of education. *The Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education* is an excellent resource for students seeking to understand how education, influenced by social and cultural forces, arrived where it is today. Public libraries, smaller academic libraries, and libraries which do not support foundations of education curriculums may be better served by a more conventional encyclopedia of education.

References

Apple, M. W. (2004). *Ideology and curriculum (3rd ed.)*. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Conant, J. B. (1963). *The education of American teachers*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Reviewed by Benjamin Johnson, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Rozema, Robert & Webb, Allen (2008). *Literature and the Web: Reading and Responding with New Technologies.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pages: 146 Price: $19.00 ISBN: 978-0-325-02147-8

As I prepare to teach a class on new literacies and technology, this book comes at an opportune time. Like most teachers who are digital immigrants, as opposed to our students, who are often "digital natives," I often feel I am barely keeping up with technological innovations in education. It is, indeed, a moving target. To help educators keep the technological target within range, Rozema and Webb offer us a pragmatic and helpful guide to integrating a variety of digitally-based activities into the English/Language Arts classroom.

Wanting to see an increase in students' love of literature, from classic to modern; a rise in engagement; and an increased ability to read difficult texts in critical ways are not uncommon English classroom goals. Rozema and Webb state that their "allegiance to these traditional goals…underwrites all of [their] ideas for integrating technology into English classrooms and curricula" (p. xiii). In this book, technology is an innovative method of delivery, even as it is used to foster goals the teacher likely already possesses.

The book is separated into chapters on (1) electronic archives in the classroom, (2) electronic discussions, (3) blogs, podcasts, and feed readers, (4) exploring literary worlds on the web, (5) establishing an effective web presence, and (6) resistance, rights and mentorship. Rozema and Webb also include narratives from their own experiences as well as samples of their students' work (it is always useful to see how students actually respond to particular lessons). There are lists of web resources at the end of each chapter, and suggestions for executing the ideas in classrooms with limited access to technology.

Many of the activities in this book contain the underlying aim of making curricula more relevant to students' lives, and since the internet is so vast in subject matter and presentation of text, it increases the possibility of doing just that. Another component of several approaches, like electronic discussions or a classroom blog, is the widening of audience, so that students are potentially writing for, and responding to, expanding rings of readers. Additionally, students can co-construct many of the approaches to technology-integration that Rozema and Webb describe, and even take the lead on some components given that they are likely more comfortable with some dimensions of e- learning. This can consequently provide opportunities to involve all students and certainly those who struggle with traditional literacy activities, like essay-writing.

As an educator who has used blogs and digital storytelling in classes, I found additional ideas to carry technological integration even further. Teachers who are still hesitant to bring in technology in more substantial ways likely feel overwhelmed at that prospect; this book provides ideas and activities along a continuum of mastery, beneficial to beginners and the moderately-skilled.

Reviewed by JuliAnna Avila, Ph.D., Assistant Professor in the College of Education's Department of Curriculum, Foundations, & Reading at Georgia Southern University.

Sandall, Susan R. & Schwartz, Ilene S. (2008). *Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs. Second Edition.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Pages: 236 Price: $34.95 ISBN: 978-1-55766-967-4

I recently had an informal discussion with a group of early childhood special education credential candidates, who are enrolled in one of my courses about promoting inclusive practices in early childhood education. The teacher candidates expressed some frustration in that they understood why young children with disabilities should be educated in inclusive, community-based settings, but they struggle with how to implement inclusive practices. I think I am safe in saying they are not the only ones faced with this dilemma. The “how to” requires diligence and planning. Often, the barriers to inclusive practices are the direct result of poor implementation of instructional planning and the lack of collaboration among support providers.

Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs provides the “how to” for implementing inclusive practices. Moreover, *Building Blocks* presents an evidence-based framework which supports positive outcomes for children with and without disabilities in inclusive educational settings. The authors, Susan Sandall and Ilene Schwartz, emphasize that the starting point for success begins in a high quality preschool environment. In addition, the authors make a point of stating that while specialized instruction is an important component of inclusion and special education, preschool educators need to focus on the whole child.

Building Blocks is a framework composed of four core components: high quality early childhood programs, curriculum modifications, embedded learning opportunities, and explicit child-focused instructional strategies. All four components are integrated with data driven assessments to measure child outcomes and collaboration among team members. The framework is explicitly organized into 12 concise chapters that embed evidence-based practice with practical applications.

Each chapter of the book offers direct and straight foreword teaching strategies. Most useful to either the novice or experienced practitioner are the chapters on curriculum modifications, embedded learning opportunities and child-focused instructional strategies. I found Chapter 6, “Embedding Learning Opportunities”, quite helpful in articulating to teacher candidates how to integrate planned opportunities for learning within the typical classroom routines and activities.

Building Blocks provides guidance for developmentally appropriate instruction that supports the inclusion of preschool children with disabilities in community-based programs. All chapters offer concrete examples using the case studies of four children. Each chapter provides sample forms and suggestions on how to use the forms in planning and instruction. The book comes with a CD that includes blank forms and curriculum modifications.

Reviewed by Janice Myck-Wayne, an assistant professor specializing in early childhood special education at California State University, Fullerton.

Stead, Tony. (2008). *Good Choice! Supporting Independent Reading and Response K-6.* Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Pages: 264 Price: $22.50 ISBN: 978-157110-732-9

Knowing that students need time in school to read (Allington, 1977), yet recognizing the short-comings of sustained silent reading, many educators (Trudel, 2007; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Taberski, 1998) are turning to independent reading as a means for fostering reading growth and reading pleasure for students. Tony Stead’s *Good Choice! Supporting Independent Reading and Response K-6* is a user-friendly book to assist teachers in establishing and maintaining an independent reading component.

In part one, Stead provides suggestions for establishing an independent reading time as well as encouraging independent reading throughout the day. Part two focuses on providing resources. In this section, Stead offers numerous tips for establishing a classroom library, organizing the library, and keeping logs and records. In part three, Stead addresses ways that teachers can provide support to students through whole-class mini-lessons, small group focus lessons, and individual conferences. He discusses approaches teachers can take to encourage children to make appropriate text selections and to read widely. Also in this section, Stead considers the benefits and drawbacks of standard book leveling. Part four spotlights the many ways that students can respond to readings and provides resources that can be used for student response.

Throughout the book, Stead draws on first-hand experience in K-6 classrooms. Many of Stead’s tips are practical, easy, and cost-effective. For example, when building a classroom library, Stead suggests placing empty cereal boxes in with the non-fiction selections rationalizing that children love to read them, they contain a host of information on a variety of topics, and

they are free. Another suggestion from Stead is to devise a book rating system on student reading logs, thus allowing the students to assist each other in book selection.

Stead seems to recognize the diversity of students in many classrooms today and makes recommendations to address struggling and reluctant readers, English language learners, and students who seem not to need support. For every suggestion that Stead makes, he provides a concrete example, such as a transcription from a conferencing session in which he and a child discuss "just right" book selection. Finally, Stead's inclusion of black line masters for all forms should prove useful for teachers wishing to implement his ideas.

References

Allington, R. (1977). If they don't read much, how they ever gonna get good? *Journal of Reading, 21*, 57-61.

Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (2001). *Guiding readers and writers: Teaching comprehension, genre, and content literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Taberski, S. (1998). What's your role during independent reading? *Instructor, 107*(5), 32-34.

Trudel, H. Making data-driven decisions: Silent reading. *The Reading Teacher, 61*(4), 308-315.

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

---

Wexler, Bruce E. (2008). *Brain and Culture: Neurobiology, Ideology, and Social Change.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Pages: 253 Price: $18.00 ISBN: 978-0-262-73193-5

Modern educators are working at an interesting time. Our work is influenced by an emerging body of knowledge from the diverse field known as cognitive science. Our work is influenced by an emerging culture in which information technology is creating unfamiliar economic and social norms and practices. Our work is influenced by frequently contradictory political pressures.

Bruce Wexler's *Brain and Culture* collects much of the recent research in cognitive science and interprets the cultural conflicts we observe in terms of that research. The five chapters begin with a review of brain research, including both animal and human studies; continue with a review of the social nature of the human brain and the neurological basis of culture; and finish with an interpretation of conflicts from the historic past to the recent past in light of the biological origins of culture.

Wexler explicates two essential points in the book. First, the environment in which a human brain develops exerts important influences on how that brain develops. In particular, Wexler describes the development of young brains, and how parents and the social interactions of the culture create familiar patterns for a young human. Those early experiences create expected patterns of reality as a brain develops. Second, when an incongruity exists between the internal expectations of a brain and the external reality of a new situation conflict can result. For an individual, the conflict can be exhibited as denial of new information, forgetting new information, or interpreting new information in a manner consistent with previous expectations. For groups, the conflict can be exhibited as social conflict, sometimes violent social conflict. Wexler explores the incongruities that arise with the death of family members and with immigration. Similar incongruities arising from other cultural changes are implicit.

For educators, this book is informative, understandable, and timely. This book is not pragmatic. Educators will not learn new strategies for creating effective classrooms, but educators will learn about the building blocks of human learning. Educators will learn about the role of the culture they create in their students lives, and educators will learn about the challenges global mobility pose for students and families. The fundamental understanding that can arise from Wexler's book is essential for efficacious education.

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