



## **Fleming, Gerald & Pike-Baky, Meredith (2004) *Rain, Steam, and Speed: Building Fluency in Adolescent Writers*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.**

According to the authors, the name of the game is fluency when it comes to teaching teenagers to write. Their goal is to create the proficiency that will allow youngsters to respond to a writing assignment of any nature without balking or stress. To achieve this end, they have created a program that reputedly will overcome writing blocks while enabling students to communicate quickly, confidently, and thoughtfully.

Although a bit gimmicky, the name of the program is based on a painting by J.M.W. Turner. The canvas features an inclement day with a steam train rushing through the rain. The book's title represents the three major features of the writing fluency program - music, prompts, and a structured weekly routine.

The "Rain" tying Turner's scene together is the music while the "Steam" is provided by the recommended prompts. Finally, the "Speed" comes from the momentum that is created by writing twice a week. I would assume the idea the book title is suppose to convey is that one will be on the right track and moving rapidly ahead if the authors' innovative ideas are followed. They explain, "When the rhythm of these three components gets established, we think you will find that your students' writing will become more thoughtful, more correct, and more substantial" (p. 11).

The most interesting feature of this program is the purported role music plays in creating fluency. Citing the research on the positive effects of music study on the development of higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving, and increased motivation to learn, the authors feel it is important to provide background music during class writing periods. The authors state that the formal role of music during these sessions "draws on the correlation between the structure of musical compositions and the organization of expository essays"(p.19), one has to wonder exactly how this happens. In the next sentence the authors admit that, "though structure is not explicitly taught in *Rain, Steam, and Speed*, it is implicitly presented through many of the music selections recommended" (p. 19). That doesn't sound very scientific to me!

Although I like the idea of using music as a background for writing, I am not sure the claim that it helps writers focus and develop ideas is supportable. I used this technique during my 39 year tenure in the classroom and often had to turn the music off when students complained that it was more of a distraction than a help.

On the other hand, the 150 prompts included in this book are so well

designed that there's little question they should help foster fluency. Each prompt is accompanied by a series of specific questions, which reinforce structure by guiding the individual towards the development of main ideas with supportive material.

Defining classroom protocols, grading and assessment practices, and the structuring of writing and feedback sessions clearly point the way to how Fleming and Pike-Baky would like to see the entire program work. Along with their excellent prompts, they include a listing of appropriate musical CDs, tips for success from students, and examples of classroom writing.

Both authors are active in the San Francisco Bay Area educational community. Fleming has thirty years of classroom experience in the San Francisco Public School system and was named the Bay Area Middle School Teacher of the Year in 2000. Pike-Baky coordinates professional development, designs writing performance assessments, and works as a classroom coach for Education Task Force in Larkspur.

Pages: 219 Price: \$24.95 ISBN: 0-7879-7456-0

**Reviewed by Robert F. Walch, Retired educator, Monterey, California**

---

**Jensen, Derrick (2004) *Walking on Water: Reading, Writing, and Revolution*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company.**

The only teaching goal any educator should set, particularly a writing instructor, is to help students come to understand who they are, to *educate* (“lead forth”) the students, rather than to *seduce* (“lead astray”), according to Derrick Jensen (p.15). He writes, “I cannot control what my students want or are able to learn, and I have no desire...to control any of these would be to reproduce in my own classroom the bureaucratic model that is killing the world, a model that values standardization over individuality...” (p. 109). His philosophy is the accumulation of decades of teaching experience, which began with college freshmen when Jensen was himself no more than a young graduate assistant. It is the atmosphere he creates which distinguishes his classroom from the teacher-centered authoritarian model, a format Jensen abandoned when he “entered the classroom for real” (p. 20).

*Walking on Water* is a free-flowing narrative in which Jensen explicates what he wants from his students (an understanding of themselves) and how he achieves this goal. He recounts early classroom failures with candor and humor, telling of disastrous lectures on never ending sentences with prepositions. The path from there to more rewarding days can be followed through his student- teacher discourse. Example: “Since it’s my experience that, as Carl Rogers wrote, the only real learning is self-discovered, self- appropriated learning, I won’t try to teach you anything. It’s my job instead to create an atmosphere where you can teach yourself” (p. 20). As one reads through the chapters, it becomes evident that he does achieve this end.

This book is not presented as a “how to” in three easy steps. It is an honest reflection of what one teacher learned about teaching, teaching he sincerely believes is best for students. He shares with the reader his disdain for grades, methods of satisfying the department’s requirements, his views on our culture’s insistence that anything can be universal, his experience at allowing alternate forms of expression in his curriculum, his five rules of good writing. Sometimes he presents the reader with problematic situations that he has encountered in the classroom, discusses cause-and-effect explanations, but stops short of delivering solutions. During one particular classroom discussion, students were candid in admitting that they did not like to think. Jensen then questioned them about what they do in the shower, in the car, during television watching. He assumed that a student who was a football fan actually *thought* about the sport while watching it. Not so. Jensen writes, “I have to be honest with you and tell you I don’t know what to make of all this. This discussion took place a decade ago . . . I still cannot quite wrap my mind around their answers or, especially, the implications” (p. 176). As a teacher, he never lies to his students; as a writer, he never fakes it for the audience.

A quick tour of chapter titles reveals his flair for brevity and his seemingly random topic list (“A Nation of Slaves,” “How to Not Teach,” “Love,” “Significance”). I sometimes wondered if he had lost something, derailed perhaps; however, just as quickly, he brought the ideas back into focus. In the end, it all made sense---even the title of his book, which turned out to be a lesson his students “taught” themselves.

For those who want to know more about teaching writing in a college setting, or for those who want new ways of looking at old ideas, Jensen’s book provides an interesting look at one teacher’s journey. Whether instructing at a university or at a prison he writes, “The foundation of my work in the classroom remains the same for both college and prison, which is to respect and love my students into becoming who they are” (p. 33). For anyone who appreciates an uncensored, opinionated, direct account of another’s experiences with teaching, this is a book worth reading.

Pages: 226    Price: \$22.50    ISBN: 1-931498-42-2

**Reviewed by Marg Cloy, University of Oklahoma**

---

**Jivin' Johnny (2004) *Jivin' Johnny's Let's Talk: Learning Through Discussion*. Midland, Ontario, Canada: Jjohnny Press.**

*Jivin' Johnny's Let's Talk* might be the right book for you if you are concerned about a quiet class and inactive students. As a teacher for 31 years, Jivin' Johnny (aka John Philips), believes there is no better teacher than a discussion group. To share his ideas, he wrote this charming booklet for teachers and for various other people as well: students, parents and those who would like to learn through discussion. It is provocative and rewarding, with condensed wisdom, serving as a useful handbook for organizing discussions and encouraging learning

in various settings.

The clear-cut structure of two sections makes the book easy to read and use. The first part contains tips for discussions and practical strategies in different situations, while the second part includes all the topics, questions and scenarios for discussion. Accordingly, those who wish to discuss but don't know how to start or what to talk about can easily go through and grasp the concise instructions and quickly locate the topics they like.

Though easy to understand and use, these short pages do not make it less informative for educators. Philips gives us many insights regarding discussion and its educational functions. He believes learning comes from interaction, and discussion is the most critical interaction, "stimulating exchange of ideas, opinions and shared feelings" (p.3). Further, he views discussion as a live process that can grow with one idea added to another and is not a process of seeking the sole "right answer" but rather "to allow the free ventilation of a multitude of individual ideas and views" (p. 7). He also expects students to gain multiple perspectives from mixed discussion groups. In other words, he encourages people to establish a diverse and interactive learning environment through open and free discussions.

The book can be both interesting and enlightening to students. The second part provides various topics, ranging from family to friendship, music to travel, as well as issues about work, the law, and so forth. Undoubtedly these questions and scenarios will arouse students' interests to talk as the issues are so close and authentic to their life. Meanwhile, it is certainly a good educational experience for kids to share knowledge and perspectives, fostering mutual communication, understanding, inclusiveness and tolerance of different perspectives.

Equally important, the discussions advocated by the author are good for students' mental health. Some sensitive topics in the book such as single parent remarriage, sex issues, and moral questions may relate to many students. Discussing those issues frankly and openly will strengthen the students' mind, prepare them for a complex society and ultimately enable them to face problems squarely and wisely.

Picking up this innocent-looking and inviting book can get people talking. The book would work best if it were paired up with other resources so students could research the questions, and learn from each other. Such dialectical inquiry could lead to further questions. Both teachers and students might benefit from having a discussion board or web log (blog) where they could create their own questions and continue to grow. Perhaps one suggestion for a future revision of the book is to add a section with some detailed discussion examples, which can further inspire and motivate more people to discuss and ...to talk.

Pages: 112    Price: \$12.95 (USA); \$17.95 (Can)    ISBN: 0-9686403-7-0

**Reviewed by Zhuran You and A. G. Rud, Purdue University.**  
**Zhuran You is a graduate student in higher education. He is interested in comparative higher education and the educational**

philosophy of John Dewey. A. G. Rud is an associate professor of educational studies. His areas include the cultural foundations of education, and he edits the journal *Education and Culture* for the John Dewey Society.

---

**Umstatter, Jack (2004) *Words, Words, Words! Ready-to-Use Games and Activities for Vocabulary Building, Grades 7-12*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.**

Umstatter presents vocabulary lessons thematically, providing reproducible pages of related words and engaging activities. The 30 units range from science and math related words to social science and literary terms. Each unit contains a list of fifteen words, four activities and review tests. Sample sentences, synonyms, and helpful hints are presented with the definitions. The helpful hints offer tips for remembering the meaning and/or spelling of a word, through the use of rhyme or an explanation of root words and prefixes. An example of a rhyming hint is “When stars abound they are all around.”

The activities vary from unit to unit, including crossword puzzles, word searches, hidden quotations, codes, multiple choice, and fill in the blank sentence completions, with answer keys in the back of the book. Intended for students in middle and high school, these activities can be used as mini lessons in a writing class or as part of the curriculum for a language arts class, and would be a great addition to a substitute teacher’s bag of tricks.

Umstatter quotes Evelyn Waugh in the foreword: “One’s vocabulary needs constant fertilizing or it will die.” In an age where it is more and more difficult to encourage students to read, and where memorization and drills are passé, this resource will hopefully spark an interest in students to experiment with language and to see relationships between words.

Pages: 336    Price: \$29.95    ISBN: 0-7879-7116-2

**Reviewed by Kathy Irwin, University of Michigan, Dearborn**

---

**Watson, T. Steuart & Steege, Mark W. (2003) *Conducting School-Based Functional Behavior Assessments: A Practitioner’s Guide*. New York: Guilford Press.**

This book was written with the purpose of providing a practical and comprehensive guide to help counsellors evaluate students’ behaviour in school. It is on the whole very readable and the authors took special care to avoid jargon that could turn off the less informed. In general it is a useful resource for practitioners. However, Watson and Steege take a very positivist approach when handling student behaviour problems. Most of the suggestions for handling behaviour problems are centred

on behaviour modification.

Most of the methods advocated in this book handle students' problems by changing observable negative behaviour. I could not help but wonder how behaviour intervention and modification alone could deal with the problems of students. Many students may not perceive that they are misbehaving. As noted by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Bandura (1988), individuals learn through observation of significant others. Further to this, Bandura (1977) noted that an individual's tendency to misbehave is dependent on the type of reinforcement given by significant others. This suggests that individuals learn to behave a certain way because of their social backgrounds. Added to this Marcus and Kitayama (1991) noted that individuals could behave in a certain manner because of cultural influences. It would seem appropriate that the practitioner be advised to go beyond observation of students to include students' points of views as well.

Chapter 1 gives a good explanation and description of the term "functional behavioural assessment" (FBA). The authors clearly explain the need for a more systematic way of evaluating student behaviour. Relevant examples given are helpful as the authors describe techniques used when carrying out the FBA process. A very structured approach based on observation of behaviours and actions aids practitioners in evaluating student problems. The FBA process described also seems to be time consuming and may not be suitable for schools where the counsellor to student ratio is high, although admittedly these methods could be modified to suit individual needs as suggested by the authors.

The positivist ideas and the need for behaviour modification are further explained in Chapter 2. A comprehensive description on how behaviourism is inappropriately used in the classroom, which results in persistent negative behaviours, is included. The chapter goes on to describe the Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence system which could be used to directly observe and record behaviour. Chapter 3 gives comprehensive guidelines on the law governing the use of such assessment on students. These laws however are applicable only to the U.S.

Watson and Steege point out that the FBA could become rather tedious and onerous. The evaluator using the FBA needs to be experienced in differentiating the various types of behaviours that are likely to be exhibited by problem students. They also note that the book contains descriptions of procedures to guide advanced practitioners. As such this book would not be suitable for young inexperienced professionals.

Chapter 5 gives some good tips on how to observe and record behaviour. Watson and Steege mention three criteria a description of behaviour should meet: objectivity, clarity and completeness. However, all three criteria call for some form of judgement on the part of the evaluator. Observations at best tend to be interpretive, based on the perceptions of the observer (Creswell, 1994). The objectivity that is required in such observations depends on the perceptions of the observer. Therefore the ability of an assessor to carry out the three criteria "objectively" is questionable. The chapter give a good detailed

description of the process of recording and taking down behaviours.

The rest of the book gives details on how to gather data for analysis. I find the process very structured and mechanical. As the authors are taking a positivist stand, the focus is on behaviour alone. A question I had throughout the book was whether the feelings and perceptions of students were being marginalized in the assessment process. Francis (1994) noted the importance of hearing from students in a particular learning situation. She notes that evaluators are often able to tell a great deal about their physical characteristics, their social behaviour, educational background and their behaviours. But they are unable to describe how students perceived tasks and how they went about handling them. The analysis of results of the assessment process did not seem to involve students in any way other than observing their behaviour.

The inclusion of Chapter 11, entitled "Training School/Agency Personnel to Implement Functional Behavioral Assessments" is a bit confusing as Watson and Steege mention that the book is meant to act as a guide for practitioners of FBA and not to be used as a training manual for them. In an earlier chapter, they also mention that it was important for individuals wanting to practice FBA to get actual training for this methodology by attending workshops. The implication would be that the book could still be used as a training manual for others in a school to practice FBA. The aims of the authors are not clear where this chapter is concerned.

On the whole the book is well written and thorough in its description of the process of carrying out an FBA. However this book is not for novices in the field. Many of the suggested intervention need a certain amount of discretion from the practitioner. The book does not address the behaviours of students from different cultural backgrounds and how it could result in the behaviours shown by students. Behaviour among students in culturally diverse classrooms in an inner city school may be very different from one that is in a suburban area. This needs to be highlighted.

## References

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

Bandura, A. (1988). Self-regulation of motivation and action through goal systems. In V. Hamilton, G. H. Bower, & N. H. Frijda (Eds.) *Cognitive Perspectives on Emotion and Motivation*. Kluwer Academic: Dordrecht, Netherlands.

Creswell, J.W. (1994). *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Sage: Thousand Oaks, California.

Francis, H. (1994). *Reflections on Psychology and Education*. Based on a valedictory lecture delivered at the Institute of Education University of London on 1st November, 1994.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge University Press, London.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: implication for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98, 224-253.

**Reviewed by S. Chee Choy, P.hD., Tunku Abdul Rahman College,  
Perak Branch Campus, Perak, Malaysia.**

---

**Yell, Michael M., Scheurman, Geoffrey & Reynolds,  
Keith (2004) *A Link to the Past: Engaging Students in the  
Study of History*. Silver Spring, Md. : National Council  
for the Social Studies.**

Educators in the social studies field are in need of high quality, practical ideas that can be adapted to several different topics. *A Link to the Past: Engaging Students in the Study of History* is a must read. The book is bursting with incredible ideas that can be adapted into any classroom and promotes the constructivist learning model of teaching.

This book's format enables teachers to find a variety of high quality teaching strategies for all parts of a lesson. The book is broken down into eight chapters. The first six chapters bring the reader through different strategies that can be used in a lesson. There are two strategies per chapter, with a brief background on why that chapter is important for inclusion in lesson plans. The strategies included can be used for an anticipatory set, discussions/lecture, writing, reading, exploring big ideas and projects/research. The presentation of a strategy provides: a description, purpose, application, overview and implementation procedures. Some chapters also include limitations and variations associated with the strategies. The procedures are broken down into digestible pieces and several strong examples are given in this portion. Examples are taken from world history and U.S. History content; however the strategies presented in this book are strong enough so that other content could easily be taught with very little modification.

The seventh chapter provides examples of lesson plans using a combination of the ideas presented in the first six chapters. The eighth chapter provides a strong list of resources that can be accessed for further study or ideas. The resource section is complete with annotations and web resources.

A sampling of the strategies provided by the authors includes: Media K-W-L (what you know, what you want to know, what you learned) and RAFT (Role/Audience/Format/Topic). Media K-W-L puts a modern spin on a classic teaching strategy. It calls for students to list and discuss what they know, what they want to know and what they learned; however, a new twist is added in order to deflect the all too common student response of "I don't know" or "I don't want to learn anything". The new twist is to "add a visual media image. A brief, catching, visual image not only serves to grab attention; it can focus that attention on the content. Additionally, while a picture may be worth a thousand words, any single visual image may raise as many questions as it answers--again creating a degree of puzzlement and offering an avenue for student questions and predictions" (p. 9). The authors use examples from the Civil War and the Black Death in order



to give readers a "real" example of how the Media K-W-L can be incorporated into the teaching repertoire of strategies.

RAFT is a writing strategy that allows the students to "assume a role of a person with a particular viewpoint and to address an audience that is connected with the subject" (p. 26). This type of writing allows for creativity, however, the content of the writing is still based on information and ideas from history. The writing takes several forms such as diary entry, letter to a friend and an article for a newspaper. The authors utilize examples from early fur trade on the Mississippi, daily life in Ghana and the discovery of the Iceman in order to provide practical examples of how to use this type of writing in the classroom.

The authors do an excellent job of creating teaching strategies that put the students at the heart of learning, where they belong. Their student-centered strategies utilize a number of different resources. They incorporate media, arts, music, reading, writing and note-taking. The ideas presented in the book are practical and doable. A large focus of *A Link to the Past: Engaging Students in the Study of History* is to get students excited about history while teaching skills to utilize while reading and writing in any content area. These strategies allow students to take an active role in the learning process. The activities lend themselves to a healthy combination of small and large group work as well as individual work. Teachers will find the book a useful resource to add to their repertoire of teaching strategies.

Pages: **93**   Price: **\$22.00**   ISBN: **0-87986-096-0**

**Reviewed by Alicia Roberson, a doctoral student in Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum at the University of Oklahoma. Her interests include integrating literature and media into social studies curriculum, inclusion and strategies to effectively mainstream students with disabilities, reading in the content areas, and strategies that can be used to aid in the transient status of students from military families.**

