education review

Brooke-Smith, Robin (2003) *Leading Learners, Leading Schools.* New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Robin Brooke-Smith, Principal of the University of Toronto Schools at the University of Toronto, Canada, asks the reader to consider the possibilities of a concept he calls Dynamical Systems Theory to gain insight and understanding into the interactions between schools and their environments. This Theory combines aspects of recent organizational and learning theories. His aim is to increase schools' "creativity, energy, learning, and fitness for purpose" (p. 42). In the Introduction Brooke-Smith warns that this theoretical approach to school management needs "a sound and secure form of governance and clear forms of accountability at all levels"(p. xx). In addition, the ideas presented by the author assume that participants will be open to the change process and not attempt to undermine its success. These are important considerations for the reader but ultimately indicate that Dynamical Systems Theory can be used in their environment if the reader is willing to address the components of the change process.

Brooke-Smith's concept of non-linear change brings the abstract to reality for educational administrators. Few administrators have the time to dissect complex theory and manipulate it to fit their own environments to assist in the change process, yet Brooke-Smith takes us through the complex theory in relatively easy to understand language even though he describes it as "rather bloodless technical and theoretical language" (p.42). Chapter 3 spends considerable time reintroducing us to the theories of Stroll and Fink, Senge, Argyris, and Stacey and how they apply to our understanding of schools as complex systems. The Figures provided in this chapter offer visual representations of Brooke-Smiths discussion, which can be applied by the reader as they consider their own environment. While it would have been easier to understand with an example case or cases to follow, the theory is easily digestible and can be applied in any situation, which perhaps makes it more directly applicable for the reader.

There appears to be two areas that are most pertinent for administrators: the concept of stocktaking of their organizations which leads back to the two warnings posed initially by the author in the Introduction, and the concept of understanding and managing anxiety in the change process. The notion of stocktaking is developed in Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 of the book "Understanding the Shadow Systems" (pp.76-77). This table can focus the energy of change into understanding what processes, people, and cultural/environmental impediments can stand in the way of implementing change in a school system as one reviews the table and considers their own environment.

Once one knows where they stand in relation to the possibility of introducing change in a school system, then change can begin to occur. It may not be the initial change that the leader was anticipating, but it can help to move some form of the change effort forward rather than result in complete failure of an idea.

The anxiety of change is addressed throughout the book acknowledging the fears and issues of those involved in the change process. As administrators we tend to overlook or minimize the effects of the change process on the participants and the anxiety this brings that may actually impede or paralyze our change efforts. Brooke-Smith indicates that we cannot overlook the anxiety involved in the change process, and instead suggests ways to actively address it.

The book is easy to understand with clear diagrams and tables, especially important considering the complexity of non- linear change. It is taking the time to think about one's own school environment that is the test of applying what Brooke- Smith offers. Time is of the essence in school leadership, however, this book offers sound theoretical driven reason for the success or failure of change initiatives. In the last chapter of the book the author offers "Lessons for Leaders in Schools" which is a review of material presented in an administrative theory or organizational dynamics course in an educational administrative preparation program. Brooke-Smith is suggesting that we go back and revisit theory to inform our practice. This section is worth reading to remind us of our theoretical underpinnings and how we should be using them in day-to-day practice. The book would make a good addition to many Educational Administration preparation courses, but is an especially good fit for an Organizational Dynamics course. It is also a good book to spur seasoned administrators to consider fresh ways of reviewing their environments prior to instituting any type of change efforts.

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Reviewed by Susan M. Perlis, Marywood University

Clement, Mary C. & Kappa Delta Pi (2003) *The ABC's of Job-Hunting for Teachers: An A-Z Guide to Landing the Perfect Job.* **Indianapolis:** Kappa Delta Pi.

Kappa Delta Pi, the international honor society in education, in partnership with Teachers- Teachers.com, a free, online teacher recruitment service, sponsored this publication that is an alphabetically arranged guide to job searching, interview preparation, and more. Written in a breezy style with short entries under most topics, its strengths lie in the presentation of questions that interviewers are likely to ask, the sample of a beginning teacher's resume, and tips on

interviewing etiquette. A few of the entries, such as Graduate School or Books, seem out of place, but the whole is a brief collection of common sense, helpful information, including a job-search checklist that summarizes much of the advice presented throughout the book. The bibliography (Resources) is quite short and the Web Resources listing is mostly addresses for state departments of education in the U.S. The author is an instructor in the teacher preparation program at a private college.

There is little new here, but the focus on teachers and those seeking their first teaching jobs makes this potentially useful for career collections in academic libraries, especially at those institutions with a teacher education program.

Pages: **83**   Price: **$10.95**   ISBN: **0-912099-44-5**

Reviewed by Roland Person, emeritus, Southern Illinois University

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Firek, Hilve (2003) *10 Easy Ways to Use Technology in the English Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Mention technology and English instruction in the same sentence and you can expect a wide range of reactions. There are those who support Clifford Stoll's contentious belief that computers don't belong in the classroom and those who are convinced that technology must be integrated into the school setting at any cost.

In *High Tech Heretic* (Doubleday. 1999) Stoll ruffled academic feathers with comments like "an inspiring teacher doesn't need computers; a mediocre teacher isn't improved by one" (p.20) but his one-man, "finger-in-the-dike" campaign obviously wasn't taken very seriously.

Fortunately or unfortunately (depending on your point of view), the computer and related technology are here to stay. Thus, it behooves all teachers, not just those in the English department, to become comfortable with the integration of this tool into the classroom. Hilve Firek's goal in *10 Easy Ways* is to help this process along for those who need a little nudge.

The former high school English and journalism instructor looks at a full range of technology not just computers. The first section of the book suggests projects that utilize audio, video, television, and movies in class projects. Following this discussion of the use of familiar technology, Firek moves on to the computer. Here she looks at interactive writing, WebQuests, concept-mapping software, class websites, and the use of PowerPoint for presentations.

The author's step-by-step instructions on how to organize student

projects will be useful to those not comfortable with some of this technology. There is also mention of a website created by Firek where one can go to download project templates, access resources, and even communicate with other teachers trying to use the ideas she presents in the book.

Attempting to grade projects that rely heavily on technology can often be a problem. One of the strengths of "10 Easy Ways…" is that rubrics for assessing student learning are provided. Even if you don't care to use Firek's rubric, it at least provides some direction in creating your own grading scale.

Teachers who have fully embraced technology will find this guide to be a little elementary. There may be a few ideas that the "old pros" haven't come across yet, but by and large, these teachers will be familiar with most of Firek's suggestions. On the other hand, those who are just beginning their careers in education or are finally embracing technology will find some very useful ways of easily working this bete noire into their curriculum.

Pages: **128**   Price: **$15.00**   ISBN: **0-325-00547-8**

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

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Rasinski, Timothy V. (2003) *The Fluent Reader: Oral Reading Strategies for Building Word Recognition, Fluency, and Comprehension.* New York: Scholastic.

The Fluent Reader by Timothy V. Rasinski is an excellent resource which could also be used by regular and special educators who are interested in collaborating in an inclusive setting while also enhancing their reading programs at the elementary level. As a special educator and teacher trainer, I feel this book would benefit all parties. This despite the fact that the author does not provide explicit information on how these methods can be used by special educators in regular education settings or how these methods would help students with disabilities succeed within the regular education classroom.

Rasinki (2003) organizes the book chapters by making a strong historical introduction on all aspects of oral reading including word building, word recognition, fluency and comprehension. He follows this by taking each instructional method previously introduced and providing more in-depth research findings, descriptions of conducting the strategy in a regular classroom, and closing thoughts on the particular topic.

In chapter 1, Rasinski describes oral reading since early American schooling times to the present, with more extensive thoughts in regards

to its current use today. He gives special attention to the Round Robin method; how we can use it today to connect spoken and written language, strengthen decoding skills, foster fluency, boost comprehension, and view the reading process with minor but vital modifications.

For Chapters 2-6, Rasinski discusses the research-based methodology in oral reading as a way to teach literacy. The chapters include: Read Aloud, Supported Reading, Repeated Reading, Performance Reading, Creating Synergy, and Oral Reading In and Across the Curriculum. In each chapter he begins with a real story of a teacher who uses this practice effectively, then moves on to cite major research in the field regarding that method, and finally provides a clear lesson and a step-by-step guide on implementation. One of the most effective examples is called A Reader's Theater. It allows students to read original work, write and create a play and then present it; effectively integrating their learning across the curriculum and exemplifying higher order thinking skills. There are numerous reproducible handouts for student and teacher use with sample uses.

Chapter 7 discusses how to integrate the methods described into the curriculum. Rasinski advocates involving parents and integrating his methods across the curriculum. He devotes some space to a program called Fast Start, which he developed to involve parents in the process of literacy. This section includes a sample parent letter and detailed directions on how to conduct a Fast Start program.

In Chapter 8 Rasinki provides a model for assessing word recognition and fluency through oral reading. The chapter offers real life, feasible, and effective methods of informal assessment and data driven instruction. There are extensive instructions on how to conduct one-minute assessments and alternatives to informal reading inventories. In addition he provides data driven tracking sheets that allow teachers to show individual and group growth over time for all students. He also includes an adapted version of NAEP's Oral Reading Fluency Scale and the Multidimensional Fluency Scale for the reader.

Overall, *The Fluent Reader* is an excellent, teacher- friendly methodology text in oral reading strategies. It is practical and links research methods to practice by providing step-by-step procedures and sample student worksheets, tables, and data-driven record keeping worksheets for teachers. A major strength is the information the author provides on international and national reading organizations and reading journals. The book is also a great tool for educators implementing inclusive practices in the classroom. I commend the author for making a difficult and confusing topic so understandable.

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Review by Claudia Rinaldi, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Department of Special Education.

Special interests include reading, learning disabilities, and emotional behavioral disorders.

Zucker, Andrew A., Kozma, Robert, et al (2003). *The Virtual High School: Teaching Generation V.* **New York: Teachers College Press**.

During the late 1980s, the term *virtual* drew mental images of children gathering in entertainment parlors to gaze into huge box-shaped machines with both hands as they navigated a joystick. Riveting bell-like sounds emanated from the machines in reaction to their movements. Their interaction commonly involved stimulating animation such as streaks of beaming lights bouncing off humans and objects, similar to a comet racing to earth, coupled with audio closely matching the victorious sounds of a Las Vegas slot machine. A glimpse further back in time would have the term constructing a very different image of Abraham Lincoln sitting at his desk with only the twinkling of candlelight to complete his law course work. When both images are combined with modern technology, such as the computer, the Internet, and correspondence and distance learning, the term *virtual* presents a far different connotation and virtual schools are the primary images to emerge.

Andrew Zucker, Director of the Center for Education Policy at Stanford Research Institute International, and his esteemed colleagues undertook a challenging task. This group of researchers analyzed the emerging phenomenon of the virtual school within kindergarten through 12th-grade (K–12) education. As the authors of *The Virtual High School: Teaching Generation V*, they selected the Concord Consortium Virtual High School of Hudson Public Schools in Hudson, Massachusetts as the study site for their investigation. The experimentation began in the mid 1990s with a U.S. Department of Education $7.4 million grant award. Although an expensive venture, the benefits of the project far outweighed the costs. Students began to effectively use interactive media and had greater access to more courses, administrative overhead was reduced, teaching strategies and learning styles were significantly augmented, and traditional pedagogical strategies were productively redefined.

Unlike the saturated "virtual cafes" throughout the United States during the 1980s and early 1990s, K–12 virtual schools— especially virtual high schools (VHSs)—gained gradual recognition. Even though higher education continues to experiment with distance learning, with a measure of success in delivering quality education to students in remote locales, K–12 distance education still faces harsh criticism. Zucker et al. did not set out to respond to the contentions of critics that virtual learning at the K–12 level dehumanizes the process of learning for both students and teachers. Further criticism also posited that the delivery system diminished learning outcomes for disadvantaged and

disenfranchised children, and that the quality of instruction, the self-discipline and motivation of the students, and the opportunity to broaden the social skills of students all suffered. Of upmost significance to these researchers was the adverse questioning of critics in terms of the effects of virtual learning on student knowledge in general.

Zucker et al. provides a profile of virtual education that is a combination of online courses such as NetCourses, distance learning, and virtual learning. When a student takes a high- school course online, added credit toward graduation is expected; however, that credit is valid only if the home district approves the course for that purpose. Consequently, rather than a course-granting organization, a VHS would better serve the academic community and its students as an accredited diploma-granting institution (Clark, 2001).

Zucker et al. take their readers on a brief, but exceptional, journey through the changes of online learning by referencing *Tinkering Toward Utopia* (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). They use the "tinkering" concept to argue the premise that technology can indeed introduce promising change to the educational system. "Tyack and Cuban looked across the history of educational change in the United States—changes that ranged from the introduction of common schooling and the Carnegie unit to the progressive education movement and the use of technology" (Zucker et al., 2003, p. 13). The Utopia principle serves as the philosophical or theoretical perspective for the Zucker et al. study.

Zucker and his associates organized this book by raising important questions related to the value of VHSs. "What is an online school? What is the online course experience for teachers and students? What are the outcomes of a virtual school? What can be learned from the VHS experience?" (pp. 15–16). The Concord Consortium Virtual High School serves as the reference point for all online schools as the authors examine the characteristics of schools, curriculum, teachers, and students. The products of commercial vendors, such as Apex Learning Software and the Blackboard platform, play a strong role in aiding and influencing the curriculum and delivery of VHSs. These researchers also analyze the successes and failures, strengths and flaws, and qualities and inadequacies of VHS online courses.

The movement toward virtual schools is a natural transition for students of the 21st century. With the rapid spread of Internet technologies, the push toward improved standards and assessment, teacher shortages, financial limitations, and the increasing demands for educational options, the VHS model is a viable alternative to the traditional school. *The Virtual High School: Teaching Generation V* is an excellent resource for state, county, district, private, and for-profit organizations as they consider the VHS as an avenue toward systemic change. This publication is rich with models and provides examples to help those strategically positioned and prepared to venture into the promising realm of virtual education.

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