



Hinchey, Patricia H. (2004) *Becoming a Critical Educator: Defining a Classroom Identity, Designing a Critical Pedagogy*. New York: Peter Lang.

Patricia Hinchey's new book, *Becoming a Critical Educator: Defining a Classroom Identity, Designing a Critical Pedagogy*, opens in an unusual fashion—Hinchey's own daughter Shawna provides an emotional message, citing that her "teaching experience has put a human face on the theoretical material that follows" (p. xi). After working for the juvenile division of the Legal Aid Society and after taking a summer's worth of education classes, Shawna Hinchey began teaching in the inner city. The descriptions of her students remind the reader that government legislation and corporate interests do not take into account that education is about human beings, ones that are often difficult to quantify.

In her first chapter, Hinchey asks, "*What, exactly, are schools for?*" (p. 8). For some, education is used to insure the dominance of a white, middle class elite who wants to control the underclass. For others, education is to train future workers. Still others see the classroom as a place to assign homework, assign grades and accept the traditional methodology often employed by well-meaning teachers. But for educators like Shawna Hinchey and her mother, education is a unique place to find empowerment and transformation. At times somber and serious and at times up-lifting and inspiring, *Becoming a Critical Educator* reminds the reader about the importance public education plays in the American democracy.

Hinchey specifies the very political nature of public education in two thought-provoking chapters. Chapter four outlines two themes apparent in national political rhetoric: "Education as Workforce Preparation" and "Education Is Failing." The former discusses President George H. Bush's intent to "invest" in America through its schools—he hoped that these investments would "keep American competitive" (p. 70). Hinchey develops the second theme by reviewing President Ronald Reagan's 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report. In this case, the author asserts that education was being used to manufacture a crisis—one that would benefit corporate America through sales of so-called "fixes."

Hinchey asserts that one such "fix" is *No Child Left Behind*, mentioned in no less than three chapters. Drawing on connections between the McGraw-Hill Corporation and the Bush family, the author suggests that the winners of high-stake tests are corporations who have seen record profits. The losers are schools and students who do not measure

up to set standards. Additionally, movements to privatize education through vouchers and for-profit school management companies further take away the democratic notion of public schooling since disadvantaged students/families can rarely afford private education.

The rest of the text focuses on the humanity of the classroom. Hinchey works in chapter three, “Expanding Our Thinking: Learning about ‘Other People’s Children,’” to fulfill her daughter’s promise of giving the text a human face. Schools have become increasingly diverse: one in four students is either Hispanic or African-American, one in three students is a racial and/or linguistic “minority,” and by 2040, a majority of students will be from the “minority class.” These so-called minority students come to school having grown up in a disadvantaged neighborhood. Additionally, they are less prepared than their white, middle class counterparts.

These great inequalities have been discussed elsewhere (see Kozol et al. 2002), but Hinchey takes this information to demonstrate how *No Child Left Behind* cannot promote a critical pedagogy that could help the students in her daughter’s classroom. She wishes for a magic wand to solve these problems, but since no such thing exists, she then advocates for a two-prong solution for teachers: reviewing their own personal stance and then finding a critical pedagogy.

Hinchey’s second chapter, “Understanding Our Own Thinking: Developing Critical Consciousness” works to identify misconceptions teachers may bring into the classroom. Since the majority of teachers are from the white, middle class, they often replicate cultural values that do not necessarily help the diverse student body. Developing a critical consciousness means to understand that ideas about what is “right” are not universal laws—they are based on varied life experiences. One example is found in Hinchey’s first chapter, “Starting Points: Assumptions and Alternatives.” Educators need to rethink classroom routines. Often teachers adopt some kind of paradigm of teaching because they think that is what they “should” do. How could these evolve into a more critical teaching practice?

For the critical educator, the goal of school is to create engaged citizens that question both who controls schools and who controls society’s ideologies. Borrowing from Dewey, Freire and more recently Giroux and Shor, Hinchey advocates for praxis, educational practice based on the reflection of students and teachers. Since each classroom is unique, there is no one way to teach, or for that matter, to test. She concludes by saying that teachers must resist the status quo. Hinchey ends with an appendix offering a list of “allies” for the critical educator.

Although awkwardly organized and sometimes hard to follow, Patricia Hinchey’s *Becoming a Critical Educator* is an important read for future and practicing educators. She works to answer a question asked by Dewey as early as 1914: “Is it possible for an educational system to be conducted by a national state and yet the full social ends of the

educative process not be restricted, constrained, and corrupted?" (p. 119). Even though her answers are not fully realized in the text, it will be up to teachers like Shawna Hinchey to create their own magic wands to insure a democratic educational system.

References

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Pages: **168** Price: **\$29.95** ISBN: **0-8204-6149-0**

Reviewed by Laura Beliveau, University of Oklahoma

LeCount, David E. (2004) *Dream Writing Assignments: 600+ Prompts for Creative Writing.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

At first glance this little book would appear to be a godsend for composition and creative writing teachers but, alas, looks can be deceiving. Always on the lookout for new writing prompts, one's first inclination may be to grab the book off the shelf, check to see if there are really 600 prompts (there are!) and head for the checkout counter.

Resist that impulse in this instance. Take a few minutes to page through the book and carefully peruse the prompts. For some instructors these topics may be perfect, but other individuals will be disappointed upon a closer inspection of the book.

When LeCount explains that "many prompts are quirky" (p. 6), he's not kidding. "What would you do if you were attacked in the morning by an alarm clock?"(p. 21), "What are three polite ways to correct a frog's croak accent that is not native to the creek?" (p .50), and "Why was the pillow designed with four corners and not three like a triangle?" (p. 82) are just three examples of prompts that certainly fit the "quirky" designation.

Another category of potential topics demands the writer do a little research, which isn't a bad idea. But built into some of them is possible

frustration at not being able to readily find the necessary information. For example, "How did Tina Turner become a pop star and for what is she famous?" (p. 98) might not be too difficult to research but that might not be the case for "Who invented the duck decoy? Or did he discover it accidentally?" (p. 55).

Many of these prompts place a high value on imagination and creativity or internet research skills. In that respect they will challenge the writer but, at the same time, some students will no doubt find them either immature or perhaps too much like a research project they might encounter in another class.

"I have woven throughout this book examples of haiku, senryu, and tanka - all Japanese verse forms," (p. 7) explains LeCount. Why do this? He continues, "I have spread such forms throughout the book at intervals so the student writer is not overwhelmed by trying all bits of advice at once." (p. 8) Since there is hardly any advice offered on how to actually attack any of these topics, that explanation doesn't, make a great deal of sense. Perhaps the truthful reply would have been, "It's my book and I'll include whatever I want to!"

Look *Dream Writing Assignments* over carefully. These prompts may indeed fit the goals you have set for your students and their personalities. If it does, "Eureka!" This will be a perfect fit! On the other hand, there are other inexpensive titles with more conventional prompts available. "201 Questions to Ask Your Kids" (Avon.\$10.00) by Pepper Schwartz might be an interesting alternative.

References

Schwartz, Pepper. (2000). *201 Questions to Ask Your Kids*. New York: Avon.

Pages: **128** Price: **\$12.00** ISBN: **0-86709-557-1**

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

Mower, Pat (2003) *Algebra Out Loud: Learning Mathematics Through Reading and Writing Activities*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Since algebra is the gate for courses beyond it, strategies to assist students in learning algebraic concepts and skills are always welcomed. *Algebra Out Loud* provides such strategies while building skills that can be used in other courses in mathematics. True to her goal to have students read and comprehend information from the algebra textbook to increase their understanding, Mower combines familiar reading and writing strategies with strategies she developed and used in her classes to motivate students to read the text. Through these strategies and

activities she provides teachers with an avenue to engage their students in accomplishing a feat that many students have avoided.

Each of the eight chapters of the book is filled with activities and strategies that can be used by teachers to address the concepts and skills to be covered in a high school or college algebra course. Each activity is introduced with three questions: What? Why? and How?. “What” gives a description of the activity; “Why” gives the objectives to be addressed; and “How” tells the activities to be used and how they will accomplish the objectives. The activities lead students to examine and read the text for a specific purpose. The novice teacher should have no problem using the examples Mower provides, while the innovative/professional teacher can go beyond the examples, by using them and the templates given to address other topics and/or add new twists to the activities.

Opening the book to the Review/Preview Process chapter of the reading section, the first chapter in the book, one is struck by how similar the first activity is to ones found in most other books on reading. It asks students to preview the chapter or section of a text to glean information and record it. But as one delves deeper into this chapter the activities change to give students a chance to recall and record their knowledge about topics, vocabulary, and concepts. There is an acknowledgement of the information students already possess and how their information compares to that of the textbook. Most of the activities throughout the reading and writing sections are designed as described above. Thus, the activities are constructed to give students a sense of ownership of the information to be learned and to pique the students’ interest by actively involving them in the text material.

Algebra Out Loud consists of a reading and a writing section each containing four chapters. The reading section begins with activities on pre-reading and ends with a chapter entitled “Readings in Algebra.” Some of the activities found in this section include K-W-L (already Known- Want to learn - Learned), Concept Circles, Semantic Word Maps, Graphic Organizers, Knowledge Ratings, and Semantic Feature Analysis. Many of these may be familiar to readers but Mower does a masterful job of using them with math topics.

One reading activity that I found intriguing is “Group Speak” found in the post reading chapter of this section. It engages the entire class to reflect on the topics/concepts in a chapter or section of a text that has already been studied. Students as a class verbally give information about the topic studied. Thus in a brainstorming fashion students contribute to a discussion of the ideas/concepts/skills found in the chapter or section being discussed. This activity and most of the other activities in *Algebra Out Loud* require or can require students to discuss ideas/concepts found in the text. It wasn’t until I noticed this characteristic of the activities that the title of the book made sense to me.

In the writing section the four chapters are “Writing to Learn Algebra,” “Writing to Communicate Algebra,” “Writing as Authentic Assessment,” and “Writing for Assessment.” In this section, also, the activities are designed to engage students. Even their titles can catch the attention of students-“In Your Own Words,” “Math Ads,” “Math Story Activity,” “Creating a Math Mnemonic,” “Math Journals,” and “Mathematical Investigator.” All provide the students with the opportunity to reflect on the concepts/skills being studied. Two activities target technology “E-Writing” and “Math Essays: Using a Graphing Calculator in Algebra.”

Given the encouragement to include technology in the classroom and how much of a motivation technology is for students, the small amount of technology interwoven into *Algebra Out Loud* is the greatest weakness that I see. But for the innovative, technology savvy teacher including technology in the activities should not pose a problem.

Pat Mower has very successfully pulled together many old and new ideas to address reading and writing in mathematics. *Algebra Out Loud* provides the teacher with techniques that can be used to increase students’ understanding of algebra concepts and to improve their facility with the skills they must use to succeed in an algebra course. All of these techniques are embedded in activities that encourage and assist students in reading algebra texts and in writing about algebra.

With the prominent role that Algebra plays in most state’s graduation requirements, in high stakes tests, in college entrance exams, and in the ability of students to succeed in other mathematics courses, Pat Mower’s *Algebra Out Loud* is a welcome resource to teachers who are looking for ideas to improve their student success rate in algebra. It can provide teachers with many new ideas and the impetus to develop or seek new techniques to assist students to successfully complete the algebra course.

Pages: 228 Price: U.S. \$29.95(U.S.), \$42.99(Canada), £19.50(U.K.) ISBN: 0 7879 6898 6

Reviewed by Merle T. Harris, a mathematics professional development trainer with the Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project. I am currently providing mathematics professional development services to 5-8th grade teachers in Yuma Elementary School District in Yuma, Arizona and 5-7th grade teachers in the Lodi Unified School District in Lodi, California. My interest is teacher development and teacher change, especially as it relates to mathematics.

Scarlett, Mel (2004) *The Great Rip-Off in American Education: Undergrads Underserved*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books.

The Great Rip-Off In American Education: Undergrads Underserved analyzes the consequences of historically ill-conceived ideological values within higher education. Scarlett makes two major points. First, is the flawed nature of the internal reward tenure system, which is primarily driven by research and publishing. He claims its weakness is exposed through the devastating consequences of a weak trickle down benefit to students. While faculty are busy with research and publishing they fail to provide real education to undergraduates who enter society as unprepared and poorly functioning citizens. Universities therefore contribute and help perpetuate many of our society's overshadowing ills. The author further notes that the paradox of higher education is that it was created to better serve the public; but this has regrettably devolved into self-touting institutions that race for bragging rights as 'cutting edge' organizations.

Scarlett's second concern, is higher education's failure -- by means of specialization -- to enable students to "see things whole" and to prepare them to be contributing members in society (p.164). Curriculum must be broader and inclusive rather than narrow and insular. Further, there is a need for greater diversity, governance, and autonomy. The author exhorts those involved in higher education to place the imperative needs of society and that of undergrads ahead of their own self-aggrandizing aspirations and specialized interests. He acknowledges the need to protect and facilitate presidential leadership by eliminating external intrusions. He presents several real-life obstacles to administration, teaching, and leadership and offers solid recommendations for improvement.

The book is presented in three main parts. Part one deals with 'Creating a Climate for Change.' The second section offers specific advice to the academy and is entitled 'Dogmatic, Radical Recommendations for Reform.' In Part three, 'Wrapping it up,' the author addresses what he sees as long standing concerns such as the 50% graduation rates for undergraduates after five years of college; ineffective and overpaid presidents; lack of adequate training of college teachers, the role of technology in teaching etc. He concludes with the observation that runaway state budget deficits have helped accelerate the great rip off of undergraduates at state universities and colleges.

Scarlett draws upon multiple studies by the likes of Ernest Boyer, author of *Reform on Campus*, a 1972 Carnegie report on the status of higher education, and the many experiences of former presidents and leaders in higher education. He sees a burning need for change and continual planning to bring about transformation in the system. Although change in higher education happens very slowly and may take as long as a hundred years, producing future citizens that see things holistically is worth the effort of reform in higher education.

The writing style of this book facilitates a great synthesis of historical events and allows the reader to fully understand the overall impact of an educational system full of paradoxes and contradictions. The tone is

conversational and makes this good reading for faculty, administrators, and those concerned with issues in higher education. There are many real life concrete examples and recommendations -- but the arguments are at the same time abstract and can be generalized to capture the bigger picture

References

Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. (1972). *Reform on campus: Changing students, changing academic programs; a report and recommendations*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Pages: **220** Price: **\$22.00** ISBN: **159102031X**

Reviewed by Helen C. Tupai, Washington State University

Shank, Patti & Sitze, Amy (2004) *Making Sense of Online Learning: A Guide for Beginners And The Truly Skeptical*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

A basic primer for anyone engaged in the technology of online teaching and learning. Designed in an easy to read format that gives step-by-step instructions on how to get started with online technologies. The authors do an excellent job of making the reader feel comfortable while addressing very complex technological strategies.

The chapter titles give a good idea of the coverage:

1. Taking the Leap
2. What about Learning?
3. The Language of Online Learning: How to Spell HTML
4. Designing for the Web
5. Tools and Technologies for Online Learning, Part 1: Development
6. Tools and Technologies for Online Learning, Part 2: Infrastructure
7. Evaluating Online Learning

The book shines a brilliant light into the semi-darkness world of instructional technology. Instead of being intimidated by the complexity of technology, you get the feeling that anyone can do it. An enjoyable read and a very well written book for those wanting to expand their instructional and learning horizons.

Pages: **162** Price: **\$35.00** ISBN: **0-7879-6982-6**

Reviewed by David E. Lee, Assistant Professor, The University of Southern Mississippi

Widmer, Kirsten & Buxton, Sarah (2004) *Workshops That Work!: 30 Days of Mini-Lessons That Help Launch and Establish All-Important Routines for an Effective Reading and Writing Workshop*. New York: Scholastic.

The lengthy subtitle of this book for new literacy teachers summarizes the book's contents. The premise is to prepare new teachers, who may not have the opportunity or means to attend a staff development program, for teaching and organizing a workshop course. It is not, the authors assert in their preface, a substitute for such a program, "but a good foundation to build upon" (p. 4). Similar in content to (but slimmer by about 400 pages than) Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle*, listed on the last page as an additional reading, Widmer and Buxton's book is divided into two parts: the Writing Workshop and the Reading Workshop. For teachers like myself who don't possess Atwell's enviable organizational skills in structuring courses, this book is a must. The routines referred to in the title help both student *and* teacher connect one class session to the next.

Cleverly organizing the book by daily lesson plan rather than by chapter, the authors present each day's lesson as divided into distinct stages. These stages are: goals and preparation; introduction to the lesson; teaching the lesson; independent work; conferring with students; group reflection (to connect the mini-lesson with individual work) (p. 27); and follow-up (to practice the lesson). By enforcing this structure, the authors claim, teachers help students "to be prepared, to act responsibly, to stay focused, and to be aware of their boundaries within that structure" (p. 11).

A word to the wise: Don't just gloss over the section entitled "Workshop Essentials" (pp. 7-20) that precedes the lessons. This section lays out the foundation and language necessary for developing a workshop and explains the purpose of each stage of the lesson plan as outlined above. Skipping "Workshop Essentials" will put one at a loss when reviewing the lessons; reading it will help one consider and develop one's own rationale for what to teach and how to approach teaching it. Also, the "Teach the Lesson" section of every lesson plan is helpful as a template only; it is not a replacement for writing your own lesson (p. 6). If you purchase this book to have ready-made lesson plans, you will be disappointed. Finally, the suggestions in this book require excellent classroom management skills. The authors are careful to point out that "workshop classrooms would be chaotic" without a "repeated and familiar structure" (p. 11). However, the authors give you the tools needed to create such a structure.

Widmer and Buxton write in a non-jargony style and include teacher dialogues with students, so a new teacher can "hear" how a lesson may come across in action (p. 5), and the tone of the book is encouraging and positive. The authors share their own stories in the intros to both parts of the book, gamely including what did and did not work in their

classrooms. Photographs of charts, a classroom library, students interacting, and sample conference sheets, all of which comprise a workshop, show new teachers what their classroom and teaching may look like before they ever set foot in a classroom. Additional scaffolding for the workshop is supplied through recommended reading, copies of worksheets, sample student writing, rubrics, and suggestions for the physical set up of the classroom.

Because it is such a short read, but packed with helpful information, *Workshops That Work!* is an excellent resource for new teachers. In fact, I suspect new teachers will dog-ear their copies, referring to them until they get the hang of workshops on their own.

References

Atwell, Nancie. (1998). *In the middle: New understandings about writing, reading, and learning*. Second edition. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Pages: **159** Price: **\$17.99** ISBN: **0-439-44406-3**

Reviewed by Déirdre Carney, M.A. Ms. Carney currently teaches English part-time at St. Peter's College and Montclair State University, both in New Jersey. Her interests are in ESL, composition, and young adult literature.

Wilkinson, David & Birmingham, Peter (2003) *Using Research Instruments: A Guide for Researchers*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Finally! A book explaining how to develop research instruments/surveys that is understandable! Wilkinson and Birmingham have written a book that helps to explain to the confused and baffled first-time researcher how to develop a research instrument. But more importantly, the book and its examples are praxis driven. They wrote “for the unexpected and unwelcome eventualities...suggesting ways of minimizing, bypassing, and overcoming difficulties...” (p. 3).

Wilkinson and Birmingham wrote this book for beginning researchers in the areas of education, social policy, social work, nursing and business administration. The reader finds examples on how to develop an instrument in a variety of formats. Chapters cover developing Questionnaires, Interviews, Content Analysis, Focus Groups, and Observations, including the use of a video camera. After an initial introduction to each format, the authors provide examples of similar instruments. “Red Flag Words” or other do-nots are noted, such as items that are too ambiguous and should not be used. Each chapter provides tips on when and how to use a certain format. A short reference section after each discussion provides suggested readings for further study.

Wilkinson and Birmingham have written for readers in the United Kingdom, but the information transfers to all nations and researchers. *Using Research Instruments* helps beginning researchers to become more confident in developing their own research instruments, whether using a questionnaire or a video camera to aid in research. Wilkinson and Birmingham have gone a long way in removing the “mystic” of developing a research instrument. The novice researcher can do no better than to have this book as a guide to through the process of research instrument development.

Pages: **175** Price: **\$25.95** ISBN: **0-203-42299-6**

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