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Meyer, Richard J. & Whitmore, Kathryn F. (Eds.) (2011)
*Reclaiming Reading: Teachers, Students, and Researchers
Regaining Spaces for Thinking and Action*. NY: Routledge.

Pp. 304 ISBN 978-0415888103

Reviewed by Rachel L. Wadham
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The outside forces that impact education often place limitations a professional's ability to engage in effective, appropriate, research-based programs and interventions. This is especially true in today's age of accountability and standards-based reform where governmental and community forces have tried to structure and legislate educational improvement. The outcomes of these reforms could be debated at length, but it seems they will be all doomed to some degree of failure until professionals take back their power and reclaim teaching and learning. The process by which this is done for reading instruction and curriculum is outlined in the book *Reclaiming Reading: Teachers, Students, and Researchers Regaining Spaces for*

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Thinking and Action, edited by Richard J. Meyer and Kathryn F. Whitmore.

The purpose of editors Meyer and Whitmore, as well as all the chapter authors, is to provide a call to arms for education professionals to reclaim their professional power. They note that teachers need to reclaim “our foundational knowledge about what learning is, how learning happens, and who learners are” (p. 5). This process then allows us to “stand up, with gathered voices, and be proactive for the learners with whom we work” (p. 6). This stance makes the overall tone of the book empowering and positive. After outlining their call to action in the first chapter, the remaining chapters are very hands on in that they outline real professionals and their successes in the classroom. Transcriptions of conversations, examples of real students, and applications of authentic texts and curriculums are fully outlined. This approach certainly makes this book a very practical one as practicing professionals can see good instruction in action allowing them to then explore further applications in their own classrooms.

In addition to providing real life examples, each chapter is designed to give professionals the tools, techniques and strategies they need to become active in remaking their learning environments by applying solid research-based strategies. For example one of the strategies outlined by the authors in chapters 2, 3, and 6 is a technique called “miscue analysis.” This technique is used to help struggling readers develop the skills they need for decoding and reading comprehension. Miscue analysis is student focused and allows professionals to place high value on the individual learner’s ability to make meaning. Placing the learner at the center not only empowers students to be motivated with their own learning it also allows teachers to provide the best possible interventions for each student. While many of the techniques offered in the book, such as miscue analysis, will certainly take more training to be applied, others such as “reading conferences” are easily transferable directly from the book.

In addition to specific techniques needed to revitalize reading instruction, the authors also broaden the scope of this text with their focus on the need to place teaching in

cultural and technological contexts. For example to emphasize important cultural contexts chapter 9 discusses global literature; and chapters 12 and 13 focus on the needs of bilingual children. Other chapters, such as chapter 8, subtly include cultural issues by discussing strategies that work with family and community to encourage interactions with children and adults to expand all the participants experience with reading. In addition to culture the authors also place a strong emphasis on technology. Believing that literacy in the 21st century is much more than just reading words on a page of a book, the authors also emphasizes digital illiteracies in chapters 8, 10, 14, and 15. These chapters outline techniques that use media and technology to harness students abilities to read and write in new formats.

A unique feature of the text is the use of chapter extensions. Following directly after each main chapter is a shorter re-envisioning of the content discussed by the previous authors. For example in chapter 7 the authors discuss conferencing with adolescent readers. Then in the extension another author discusses the application of the same technique with elementary students. This juxtaposition is a perfect way for the authors to show that they practice what they preach and that in order to reclaim reading we need to have “gathered voices” (p. 6) engaged in “good talk about good teaching.” (p. 7). This technique, however also serves to jumble up the progression of the text, giving the text a circuitous instead of a direct style. This makes the overall structure of the work confusing at times as readers revisit topics and ideas previously discussed. This also makes the work less of a standalone reading experience. Even though the chapters are self-contained the entire context of previous chapters including the introductory and concluding chapters are essential reading to understand the motivation and context of the text. Thus reading from cover to cover, instead of just selecting individual chapters, is necessary to get the comprehensive vision needed to appreciate this work.

Change never comes easy nor is it swift; however, all it takes is a few innovators standing up, engaging in conversations, and being proactive about what they want changed. In *Reclaiming Reading*, Meyer, Whitmore, and all their colleagues provide just the right context and set of ideas that can certainly start this process of change for

remaking the teaching and learning of reading. The empowering tone, solid-research base, broad scope, and practical applications make this book a solid place to start for professionals interested in taking on the outside forces that may be overriding their professional ideals.

About the Reviewer

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