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reseñas educativas (Spanish)
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Brief reviews for January 2006

Ayers, William (2004). *Teaching Toward Freedom: Moral Commitment and Ethical Action in the Classroom*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Teaching Toward Freedom grew out of a series of public lectures Ayers gave when he was a visiting scholar at Lesley University in Cambridge Massachusetts. He designs this book around five essays that examine how teachers need to value their students, challenge themselves, and teach for freedom. The subtitles for the essays are:

- What is Teaching for?
- Who in the World Am I?
- Where is my place in the world?
- What are my Choices?
- Teaching toward Freedom.

To redraw the lines concerning how and why we teach, the author uses classroom experiences (his and those of others) and literature (historical and popular, prose and poetry), and media (visual, auditory, and print). He encourages us to break open our minds to keep them from freezing and to re-examine the authoritarian top-down, dominating communication that so often typifies education. Citing Paulo Freire's writings he expresses disgust at the banking approach to education where students are viewed as lifeless piggy banks being filled up by teachers' daily deposits. Ayers claims authoritarianism as backward to humanism. Teachers must learn to think freely and make sense of themselves rather than fall victim to the dot-to-dot formulas so commonly embraced. He believes it is absurd to think that passing a test is all that is required to validate a person as qualified to be a teacher. I agree; anyone who has been at the tip of the testing "whip" has probably shared the thought.

Ayers thinks education has a social surrounding that involves ushering the young into some form of social order. He encourages teachers to ask themselves, "what am I teaching for?" and "What am I teaching against?" Teaching is ethical work and demands moral commitment and ethical action. The author helps to clarify these social tasks for us by stating that morality implies the questioning of reasons and thought and choosing between alternatives. Ethical behavior is action within an explicit community. We are given an important reminder that moral thought and actions of virtue begin with being accepted and cared for, valued as a human, and recognized as being in a shared predicament.

Ayers highlights some outstanding teachers. Vivian Paley, a noted kindergarten teacher and writer, challenges her readers to create a space where the great virtues are visible, modeled and rehearsed, enacted and demonstrated. Septima Clark empowered her students by affirming their life experiences and serving as a cultural and personal mirror for them.

An important tenet of the book is that teaching is an enterprise that helps humans reach the full measure of their humanity and education. It is an enabler that allows teachers and students to become more powerfully and self-consciously alive. We are brought to hear the humanistic teacher's fundamental message is you can change your life and you must; you can transform your world, if you will.

The author stresses that the role of teacher necessitates taking the side of the students as learners and to honor their humanity. Teachers stand with, not above, their students and share their predicaments. Students must be encouraged to imagine different future worlds where justice is better served and where we create a vision that is needed for a better world. Teachers must create dynamic learning communities through dialogue. Students must be encouraged to ask who in the world they are and who they are in the world. For Ayers, true education is self-education.

I agree with the author that each of us is more than a label. He points out that our lives are unfinished works in progress and, as such, labels are bad. Tags such as "at-risk" often blame poor people for poverty and reduce human beings to objects. No one is simply poor, female, Christian, Muslim, or Jew. Instead we are each a composite of personal will and human history. Many times students are discounted and ignored because they do not fit the mainstream of society. Anyone who works with children is aware of labels and the discrimination often associated with diversity.

One haunting story told by the author was of events after the death of Ella Fitzgerald, a great jazz singer. Unknown to most, as a teenager she spent time in a detention center where she was most likely labeled as unsuccessful and at-risk for failure. After Fitzgerald's death, a reporter seeking background on the diva tracked down her English teacher from those days of detention. The teacher's comments were that she had had the great singer in her class but never realized the potential in this student. All of the students in that school had potential, but it is too often ignored. Millions of children see no future for themselves, and often little is done to change that view. Ayers wordsmith's a poignant statement when he says teachers can be the "midwives of hope."

The text encourages us to teach toward freedom, to teach what could be but is not yet. We are urged to recognize that to be human places us on a voyage. We, and our children, are dynamic, constantly in motion, and forever on a journey.

I especially appreciated the reminder that we must learn to respect the experiences of our students and of ourselves and strive to determine who we are and who we are in the world. I agree with Ayers that Americans are often the just victims of jokes for their lack of sense of geography and history. We tend to be pulled by privilege and tribe to believing there is one best way to be and behave. We tend to know only of what is closely around us and ignore the unfamiliar, distant, and past. Classrooms are porous places that cannot ignore the greater world. A wider vision and comprehensive knowledge of humankind must be presented for there to be greater understanding of purpose and place in our global society.

We as readers are brought to realize that democracy is characterized by dialogue. We need to be student centered, family centered, and community centered. We must address the breadth of humanism, and we must think of ourselves less as determined and more as self-determining. We must listen to learn and allow ourselves to be students of our students, for what can be has yet to be determined.

All in all, this is great read for anyone involved in or influenced by education, which is pretty much everyone. The ideas are sound and clearly presented so that the reader is forced to reflect on the premises presented and compare the thoughts of the author to his own.

Pages: 168 Price: \$23.00(cloth) \$15.00(paper) ISBN: 0-8070-3268-9(cloth) 0-8070-3269-7(paper)

Reviewed by Kathleen E. Fite, Professor of Education, Texas State University

Bryson, Bethany (2005). *Making Multiculturalism: Boundaries and Meaning in U.S English Departments*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Making Multiculturalism is not a "how-to" book, but rather an interesting and educational summary of the *Boundaries and Meaning* as discovered in an ethnographic-style examination of four representative United States tertiary-level English Departments. What Bethany Bryson does in presenting the results of her study is to force readers to come to terms with their own definitions of multiculturalism. This book is not just for those interested in the definitions and implementation of multiculturalism as found in English departments, it is also for those who wish to critically examine their own definitions and actions.

There is some possible confusion for the reader in the opening chapter. There is an assumption of a common understanding and a thorough knowledge of the background of the canon wars taking place in United States literary studies during the latter decades of the twentieth century. Coming at this book from a different culture, in my case as a Canadian music educator, put me on the outside of what I expected to be a familiar topic. Musicians, too, have a Western Canon, which some circles, like the first professor Bryson interviewed at the

institution she calls "Ivory Towers," would consider multicultural, since it covers many eras, styles and countries. (No musician would mistake the music of Debussy for that of Beethoven.)

I began this book expecting *multicultural* to be of *many cultures* as defined for example by race, gender, era, or location. That is closest to the definition ascribed to another interview locale, "Multicultural State," in its mission statement. It is not until the second chapter that one is introduced to the other various possible meanings as determined by the computer analyses of the interviews. Bryson introduces these meanings by acknowledging her own surprise at a response during her first interview. What she has failed to take into consideration is the definition for multiculturalism that the reader brings to the comprehension of the study and the frustration that the reader may have with chapter one.

Numerous times I questioned to what degree the bias of the investigator was influencing the interpretation of the results. Although researcher bias is common in such a study, since "the interviewer and interviewee are both players" (Rosenblatt, 2002, p. 894), it is normally openly addressed in the results. For example, although Bryson used computer software to sort her phrases (bravo, as it did help a great deal in the elimination of bias) it still sorted the results ultimately into four categories identified by her, and the phrases entered were sometimes not verbatim, but summaries. This is not to say there was a better way, but only that researcher bias is present at each step, and could have been identified.

There are other methodological and reportorial questions, which affect the way the reader may accept the resulting multicultural meanings and boundaries Bryson ascribes to English departments. Why try to extract quantitative data from such a small sample without fully letting the reader know the numbers behind the conclusions? The table outlining the characteristics of the universities/colleges (again a cultural problem – universities and colleges are not the same thing in Canada) that are examined is a wonderful addition, but how many English teachers were interviewed at each location? Without this total number (careful reading of the acknowledgements will tell you there were 76 English professors and numerous graduate students, but Table 4.4 indicates 61 professors and Figure 4.1 totals 60) the use of percentages in the Figures could be misleading. Figure 3.3, for example, (no totals given) displays the percentages of professors from each location using each of Bryson's uncovered definitions, but one cannot but wonder how there could be 7%, 8%, and 17% in sections of the Multi Cultural State results, when the total number of professors in text for Multi Cultural State was 12. One professor would be 8.3%, so whence came the seven percent? Using percentages may have evened out the playing field in responses, but in a qualitative study, the difference in location and size is an important part of the study. Missing, too, is an appendix listing the questions used to elicit these responses.

Since this book is a report of the study, it would have been helpful to have the methodology clearly explained. Although Bryson indicates that she chose four locations based on a two by two grid (elite, nonelite, progressive, and traditional) she does not tell us how she determined which four to approach, or why, for example, there was not consistency in the number of undergraduates in each, so that the size of the departments could be compared. Some of the conclusions she has reached may well be more to do with the institution's size and financing than decisions regarding the canon, boundaries, or multiculturalism. For example, the situation of having one professor teach a large class with the help of graduate students was equally likely to have been a financial decision as an agenda to control curriculum content or keep professor autonomy.

Bryson's intended audience for this book is hard to identify, but, if one is interested in peeking inside the workings of four tertiary-level English departments to determine how the culture of the department is affected by boundaries such as size, age, tenure, finances and student population, then *Making Multiculturalism* is an excellent source. More importantly, if one wishes to be forced to critically think about his or her personal beliefs on the definition and implementation of the study of diverse cultures in any discipline, Bryson has presented an excellent starting point. Considering the questions on methodology and presentation, I have intentionally left out comments on her conclusions; one is not bound to agree with her analyses, only to think about what she presents in order to better evaluate personal *Boundaries and Meaning*.

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Rosenblatt, P. (2002). Interviewing at the border of fact and fiction. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 893-909). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Pages: **215** Price: **\$19.95** ISBN: **0-8047-5164-1**

Reviewed by Dr. Nora Vince, education consultant for Music Research Associates, Ontario, Canada.

Buckner, Aimee (2005). *Notebook Know-How: Strategies for the Writer's Notebook*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Buckner has developed *Notebook Know-How* as a strong practical guide for educators. It moves the reader from understanding the basics of the writer's notebook, through the introduction, maintenance and finally the assessment of students' notebooks. Intended to address how to incorporate the writer's notebook for grades 3-8, Buckner asserts, "the most important aspect of a notebook is that it allows students the practice of simply writing... we should write as a habit" (p. 7). Throughout the book Buckner stresses that, "keeping a notebook is a process" (p. 7). The process Buckner demonstrates for the reader is how to move away from the educator "doing too much of their [students] writing" (p. 2) and towards a practice that allows "teachers to write daily with their students" (p. 3) through the use of the writer's notebook.

The middle chapters of the book move the reader through the process of introducing the use of notebooks, maintaining quality writing, how to use the notebook to address reading, and the structuring rules of writing. The highlighted techniques through these chapters are very useful references for educators. The techniques are not simply prompts to direct student writing, but are student-centered approaches that allow for a deep investment of students in their own learning to write process. These techniques require writers to think deeply about their writing. At many times the intended age range for students was unclear. However, this is the very strength of the book. *Notebook Know-How* encourages educators to develop their own writer's notebook along with their students. The techniques outlined by Buckner are useful for all writers, whatever their age or grade level.

Most importantly, *Notebook Know-How* eloquently develops a process for the assessment of writer's notebooks that actively involves the students. Buckner describes a process of self-evaluation, which demands that students re-read and reflect thoughtfully on their own writing and their process of writing development. Included are highlighted self-evaluation forms within the chapter, as well as in the appendix for quick reference. Articulating thoughtful self-reflection once again moves the student to the center of his or her own learning. Here the students, instead of the educator, learn to read their own development as writers. Writing self-reflection is a highly valued skill and its inclusion in *Notebook Know-How* makes this book a very strong guide for any educator interested in using writer's notebooks.

Pages: 136 Price: \$15.00 ISBN: 1-57110-413-5

Reviewed by Pariss Garramone, PhD Student, Faculty of Education, York University.

Culham, Ruth (2005). *6+1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide for the Primary Grades*. New York: Scholastic.

6+1 Traits of Writing is a useful, comprehensive teaching and assessment resource book for Early Childhood teachers to identify the writing needs of their students and further develop student writing skills. In this book, Culham identifies seven defined characteristics, or as she terms it *traits*, of good writing, that should be developed in the primary years. These include: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions and presentation. As she describes it, "The trait model empowers young students to think like writers, talk like writers and write like writers because it gives them the language to do so" (p. 299). The teacher in effect is given the means to move from a product-centered classroom to a process-centered classroom. In Culham's words, "Helping young writers understand a general definition of process is a first step to helping them understand writing as a process" (p. 29).

Throughout the book Culham takes the role of a fellow teacher as she provides a practical, research-oriented, developmental framework for the writing process that can be easily implemented within a primary classroom. In the words of Culham,

Primary writers are hungry to communicate. They want to write and often find creative and imaginative ways to do so long before they are able to create conventional text. Although their pages may appear to be filled with nothing but scribbles, we must remember that they are writing. Therefore we must learn how to read even rudimentary text with keen perspective (p. 9).

Culham outlines the importance of a primary teacher to be able to sift through the initial writings of a child and find the strengths and weaknesses within. She provides a yardstick whereby each child's writing can be assessed through a scoring guide. The book gives explicit primary scoring guides for each of the seven traits in order to assess individual or group needs within a classroom. She provides the context and the related tools such as student conferencing, focus lessons and children's literature to support the writing framework

provided in this book. In short, she encourages teachers to look closely at the writing of students and find out their place within the framework.

Culham's underlying theory in this book identifies the fact that primary writers want to write. While the process cannot be rushed, the importance of developing a good writing practice within early learners cannot be minimized. The younger the learners, the more eager they are to learn. Culham asks teachers to tap into this eagerness to develop sound writing skills. She also asserts that good teaching must be an outcome of sound assessment. Hence the teacher must be able to ascertain where the student's skills are strong and where improvement is needed.

The book is organized into nine chapters. The initial two outline the rationale for the book and the need for the writing process to be blended with the traits for the beginning writer. They also identify the need not to turn the writing process into a recipe. The steps in the process should not dictate what writers do; the writing should (p. 46). Culham cautions that while primary writers should be shown the steps that will assist them in becoming successful writers, the steps in themselves should not be locked in and become an end rather than a means.

Chapters 3 to 9 follow with an in-depth analysis of each of the traits. Culham provides in each chapter not only the basis for the trait but also

- definitions of each trait
- examples of how to assess each trait using the primary guide and student writing samples
- teaching points that can be used while teaching students about the trait
- the use of music as a means for students to internalize each trait through its individual song
- focus lessons
- related supportive activities to develop understanding and application of the trait
- relevant quotes from other experts in this field
- and final comments that sum up each trait and its use in the overall development of writing.

Culham provides three valuable tools for a primary teacher to use during the teaching and learning of these traits: in each chapter she gives tips for students to learn which can be used as precise teaching points for the internalizing of these traits; she provides conferencing comments related specifically to each trait that a teacher can use in student conferences and; she provides a number of references to children's literature that can be used as a means through which the traits are further strengthened within the learner's mind. As Culham puts it, "Primary classrooms should be places where there are writing demonstrations and discussions every day about what comes next and why. They should be places where there's a strong connection between reading and writing, as students look to mentor texts as models " (p. 46). Finally in each of these chapters, Culham provides a means whereby students can be in charge of their own learning as well as become learning coaches for their peers, when they are ready. Through the inclusion of student-friendly versions of each of the trait scoring guides, students are empowered to engage in self- assessment as well as peer-assessment activities.

As Culham puts it, 'Primary writers must be nurtured and their work celebrated in order for them to take the next steps toward more complex writing. We're their teacher-coach, whispering encouraging words into their ears at the beginning of each heat: " You can do this. You have the tools. You've trained hard. Now go, do your best" (pg. 11). Culham encourages primary teachers to look beyond the wobbly letters and pictures and see the stories that these youngsters are writing and to celebrate their ideas and their sharing of information with us. She identifies the need for a writing classroom to be encouraging as it provides the students with critical and valuable feedback on how to continue to put their ideas to paper and write efficiently.

As a teacher myself, I find the usefulness of Culham's writing as I set up my writing activities for the next academic year. Her scoring guides will help me create an assessment system that will continuously feed into my teaching within the classroom. I also find a lot of scope in developing a classroom environment where I will adopt the role of a coach as I encourage my students to realize their potential in their writing. I find that as I internalize the concepts explored in this book, I will be using it not only as a guideline while planning my lessons but also as an improvement tool which will feed into my professional growth as an Early Childhood teacher. It is in the very simplicity of its presentation that the true potential of this book is realized.

Finally in the words of Culham, "Be fearless. The energy you bring to your work, your faith that young writers have no limitations, and your willingness to try new things right along with them will make all the difference. Commit to leaving no stone unturned in your quest to inspire young writers" (p. 299).

Pages: **306** Price: **\$26.99 U.S./\$36.99 CAN.** ISBN: **0-439-57412-9**

Reviewed by Venesser M. Pate, Doctorate of Education student, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

Handwerker, Mark J. (2004). *Science Essentials, Middle School Level: Lesson and Activities for Test Preparation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

In this era of the all-important standardized test, many authors have put together curriculum materials purported to prepare students to sit for these examinations. Why, then, should anyone spend time on yet another anthology for this purpose? Simple: very few of the “anthologies” are as complete as Handwerker’s *Science Essentials*.

Many teachers have already spent time preparing good quality lessons that work. Quite obviously, Handwerker is one of those teachers. It is important to have activities that are easy to prepare and are not resource-intensive; funds are often short, both for districts and the teachers who must buy their own supplies and wait for a reimbursement check.

Handwerker has created a book of activities that covers many of the content standards; included are physical science (specifically motion and forces), chemistry, astronomy, and biology (absent is any geology, weather or other earth science standard). He provides basic instructional information for the teacher, including step-by-step instructions for the teacher to make the activity successful, and for the student basic background information that the student needs to know to be successful in the activity.

While the collection of activities is impressive, the reproducible pages explaining standardized tests to parents are just as impressive. Because individual states have created their own tests, the pages may or may not be completely appropriate for all states. The book includes vocabulary terms meant to help parents understand exactly what the test covers and how the information yielded from the examination may be used, and reproducible pages to facilitate discussions with students about what they can do to do their best on the exams.

Pages: 416 Price: \$29.95 ISBN: 0-7879-7577-X

Reviewed by Myka H. Raymond, Ph.D., Overland High School, Aurora, Colorado

Hughes, Richard L. & Beatty, Katherine Colarelli (2005). *Becoming a Strategic Leader: Your Role in Your Organization's Enduring Success*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Becoming a Strategic Leader is a leadership book written by Richard Hughes and Katherine Beatty from the renown Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), to offer academic and non-academic leaders the tools necessary for implementing a strategic leadership process. The book contains seven chapters outlining the framework of strategic leadership and includes practical suggestions on how to develop the individual, team, and organizational skills needed for institutions to become more adaptable, flexible, and resilient.

Chapter one, “What Is Strategic Leadership,” provides a deeper insight into strategic leadership by defining the term and discussing vital issues like “What makes strategic leadership different,” “Where strategic leadership falters,” “Creating sustainability,” and “Implications for strategic leaders.” The authors do a great job of providing real life examples (IBM, Digital Equipment Corporation, and Neoforma) to exemplify leadership that does or does not create sustainable competitive advantage.

“Strategic Thinking,” introduces an important concept every strategic leader needs. The authors expound on “the artful nature of strategic thinking,” by emphasizing “It is not enough to have great individual strategic thinkers. It also takes individuals who influence one another’s thinking, deepening and enhancing their collective understanding and insight” (p. 44). This reviewer enjoyed reading this chapter because it provides a practical guide to developing strategic thinking.

“Strategic Acting,” discusses the importance of a learning orientation for individual leaders. At the outset, this reviewer thought that “strategic thinking” and “strategic acting” were synonymous terms, but the authors uniquely present the two as separate and distinct concepts of strategic leadership. More specifically, the authors mention that the focus of strategic acting is “*committing resources to build sustainable competitive advantage*” (p. 85 italics in original) through setting clear priorities, creating conditions for others’ effectiveness, acting decisively in the face of uncertainty, acting with the short term and long term in mind, and having the courage of your convictions.

Chapter four, "Strategic Influence," is the longest chapter in the book and here, the authors admonish the leader "to influence others by involving them in the process and by connecting at an emotional level" (p. 134). Like in chapters two and three, the authors provide a self-assessment model for the reader to evaluate his or her own strategic influencing skills; however, the authors do not provide a viable procedure for interpreting the evaluation results.

In "Strategic Leadership Teams," the authors point out the importance of strategic leadership teams (SLTs). The authors dexterously tied this chapter to chapters two, three and four, so as to demonstrate that teams have to think, act and influence strategically in order to be successful; otherwise, the team may be doomed to fail. However, in their endeavor to relate this chapter to the previous three, the authors needlessly repeat most of the areas already covered.

In "Making Strategy a Learning Process in Your Organization," the authors elaborate the organizational conditions that support strategy as a learning process, namely: culture, structure and systems. More importantly, they illustrate these conditions by giving a comparison of two cases (College of Liberal Arts and Catholic Healthcare Partners) where one organization failed to apply the organizational conditions that are necessary to foster strategy as a learning process, and the other organization embraced those conditions and thus reaped many benefits. The comparison is ingenious and a great lesson for any academic leader.

Chapter Seven, "Becoming a Strategic Leader," sums up the book and offers final suggestions about "how to be ride the wave of leadership development" (p. 215) from the individual point of view. The authors revisit their model for strategy as a learning process (assessing where you are, understanding who you are and where you want to go, learning how to get there, making the journey and checking your progress), to provide a guideline for becoming a strategic leader. This reviewer deems that reading chapter seven alone may be adequate for the person who simply wants an overview of the book.

Overall, *Becoming a Strategic Leader* is a great book for any practitioner of strategic leadership and it is recommended reading for all college or university administrators, and scholars of higher education who are aspiring to become exemplary strategic leaders. The real life examples provided in the book adequately reinforce the authors' thoughts in illustrating the strategic concepts of thinking, acting and influencing.

Pages: **228** Price: **\$32.00** ISBN: **0-7879-6867-6**

Reviewed by Julius Sonko, Dallas Baptist University.

Johnson, LouAnne (2005). *Teaching Outside the Box: How to Grab Your Students By Their Brains*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Although the title may suggest some avant-garde or startling new ways to engage students, there isn't anything in this book that hasn't been mentioned before in a workshop or book. That being said, this is still a valuable resource for teachers who might be having difficulty getting their students to buy into the subject matter or the academic approach being used to present it.

Few, if any, teachers will take issue with Johnson's belief that it's necessary to get the attention of the student before the individual can be taught anything. How one accomplishes this, of course, is the question. The answers will vary depending on the subject matter, the teacher's personality, and teaching situation.

Johnson shares a number of strategies for getting a student's attention and this is the strength of "Teaching Outside the Box". The inclusion of real life anecdotes along with a question and answer section from students asking for advice makes the book entertaining and underscores the author's own credentials as a "super" teacher (she graciously provides the definition of super, excellent, and good teachers in the opening chapter). This isn't why you should spend a half hour's pay (perhaps a hour in some states) to purchase this book, though.

Learning more about how to create a positive discipline plan, motivate reluctant readers, cope with classroom bullies, and handle student portfolios are some of the reasons why you may want to read what Johnson has to say. The discussion of successful classroom management coupled with checklists and student handouts provide the down-to-earth advice any new or veteran teacher will appreciate.

Certainly not all of Johnson's suggestions will appeal to her readers. I wasn't enamoured with the idea of letting students vote to determine if they wanted to finish a novel once they were halfway through it. But nevertheless, there is so much crammed into this book that even the seasoned "old pro" will come away with a couple of ideas worth testing in the classroom.

Lou Anne Johnson is the author of the bestseller memoir *My Posse Don't Do Homework* which was made into the 1995 film *Dangerous Minds*. Some of the community college instructor's other titles include *The Queen of Education* and *The Girls in the Back of the Class*.

References

Johnson, L. (1995). *The girls in the back of the class*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Johnson, L. (1992). *My posse don't do homework*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Johnson, L. (2004). *The queen of education: Rules for making school work*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Simpson, D. (Producer) & Bruckheimer, J. (Producer) (1995). *Dangerous Minds*. [Motion picture]. United States: Hollywood Pictures. (Available from Buena Vista Home Video, Burbank, Calif)

Pages: **324** Price: **\$24.95** ISBN: : **0-7879-7471-4**

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

Kittle, Penny (2005). *The Greatest Catch: A Life in Teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Penny Kittle's *The Greatest Catch: A Life in Teaching* draws on her twenty years of experience as an English teacher to share twenty-five authentic stories about teaching and building relationships with students. Having taught at all levels, from elementary to graduate school, Kittle's vignettes are accessible for all teachers. Always optimistic, Kittle avoids romanticizing teaching and lays bare the frustrations and sense of futility that often come with the joy of teaching. She acknowledges and accepts the messy and unfinished nature of teaching, and her stories demonstrate that teachers who care about their students can still be a source of hope.

The book's title provides a good metaphor for teachers reaching out to "catch" (in the spirit of "catch and release," of course) students. Kittle is careful not to overuse the metaphor, however, and deftly applies it in the opening story, the final story, and only a couple in between. Each vignette focuses on one or two students. She includes students that she "caught" ("Emily," "Katelyn," et al.) as well as those that got away (Jerry in "My First Steelie," "David," Crystal in "Second Chance," et al).

Woven throughout the stories is the importance that writing and teaching writing have played in Kittle's quest to build relationships with her students. Her stories demonstrate that when given the chance students often teach themselves through their writing. As appendices to the book, Kittle provides "Craft Notes" that describe her writing process, citing different stories from the book as examples of how she, among other things, prewrites, drafts, revises, and "lets go" of her writing. Though seemingly superfluous to the book, the "Craft Notes" are an added bonus to writing teachers, providing practical information about the writing process. In addition, they are an interesting way to revisit some of Kittle's stories through the eyes of the writer herself.

The book reads quickly since each vignette runs only two to five pages in length. Notably, the book is put together so that the stories can be read together from beginning to end or each can stand alone.

As a fellow English teacher, I found the book to be rejuvenating. Kittle demonstrates through her powerful stories how she has endured many hardships and tough relationships with students but has always maintained her hope and joy in teaching. I plan to reread these stories in the future and share them with all of my colleagues and teacher friends.

Pages: **140** Price: **\$17.00** ISBN: **0-325-00710-1**

Reviewed by Blake R. Bickham, currently a reading instructor and doctoral candidate in teaching and teacher education at the University of Houston.

McGuinness, Diane (2005). *Language Development and Learning to Read: The Scientific Study of How Language Development Affects Reading Skill*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

This book provides comprehensive documentation of research carried out on reading development in the past

thirty years. Professor Diane McGuinness is a leading authority on reading research who in this book, which forms the second volume of two on the subject, dissects in her own words, "the reading predictors - whether or not individual differences in specific perceptual, linguistic, or cognitive skill influence children's ability to learn to read" (p. viii). The book differs from a plethora of others on this topic by drawing on eclectic collections of reading research particularly from fields external to that of reading acquisition. The field of psychology, with which McGuinness herself is affiliated, receives notable acknowledgement in providing answers to some of the questions that have puzzled twentieth century scholars since the inception of literacy education.

The two companion volumes emanate from research that McGuinness carried out for the newly inaugurated National Institute of Child Health and Human Development as mandated by the US Congress in 1997. The first volume, *Early Reading Instruction* (2004), accounts for the historical and scientific aspects of reading instruction research as authorized by the National Reading Panel of which McGuinness is an active supporter. In the preface McGuinness explains that her decision to divide her report into two sizeable volumes is substantiated mainly by the surprisingly large number of studies found on research into reading across many disciplines. Much of the research examined by McGuinness brought disappointment in terms of notably poor quality when measured against methodological benchmarks. Impressive figures are presented which claim that only 4 % of the 1000 studies evaluated on reading research would unfailingly qualify as providing evidence on scientific grounds. This sets the premise for the second and currently reviewed volume, which takes a critical view particularly on the quality of methodology and research designs in the studies under scrutiny.

The book is divided into three sections beginning with the phonological position in language theory, through the expressive language and academic skills relationship to the language-reading link and its assessment procedures. It is written in an easily accessible textual style, with catchy section titles such as "What is phoneme awareness and does it matter?" A glossary of terms is provided and the list of references is substantial.

The first section explores research evidence put forward on the sequential development of phonological processing and its subsequent benefits to the learning of orthographies. It is based on the common assumption that language development is contingent upon effective phonological processing skills and that reading ability is dependent on the correct sequential development of phonological awareness. Evidence in this section is drawn from the field of perception, which renders the phonological processing/ sequencing theory inconsistent. The author concludes that current research on the development of speech perception and speech production shows no causal links with phonological processing. The section also reports a lack of evidence on correlations between phonological processing and reading skills.

The second section reviews research conducted in psycholinguistics and by phoneticians and linguists on links between speech production and linguistic features such as semantics, syntax, productive vocabulary, reading and general academic skill levels. Here McGuinness makes a methodological discovery that complements the rigor employed by this group of researchers with reference to their lack of deductive thinking as a foundation driving the strength of research methodology. Longitudinal studies in general language functions receive a careful examination, and the author concludes that these studies provide highly original and the most significant data findings on the topic to date. One of the welcome claims made in this section derives from cross-cultural data in non-English speaking countries that have a transparent alphabetical writing system. Such countries report no or low illiteracy rates (with reference made to OECD reports) and the condition of "dyslexia" is entirely unknown, due to there being no need for decoding in reading acquisition in such writing systems. This finding is positioned as counter evidence against the assumption of a positive correlation between language development and learning to read on universal grounds. If the correlation holds true, the effect would be observable globally (since language is biological), which it clearly is not, at least according to evidence cited by Wimmer (1993). Reference to a mere two sources for this substantiated global assertion, may prove questionable, however. If the language-reading link is to be substantiated, argues McGuinness, it would need to be qualified by the specific writing system the child has to learn (p. 207).

The final section explores the specific topic of which language skills predict effective reading acquisition. It covers aspects of vocabulary, verbal memory, syntax, naming speed and accuracy (p. 18). The outcome is an outline of methodological controversies that, McGuinness argues, are positioned to support deductive theory building but which are unreliable without scientific reservation or any self-questioning of theses put forward. She presents an apt point regarding the aims of theory building in scientific research, which ought not to protect a theory, but rather to put a theory to the test by reliable and valid research means (p. 425). The text continues through studies arguing for correlations and causal effects between reading acquisition, and auditory and visual processing (e.g. dyslexia), memory and syntax. Conclusions regard consistent links available between syntax and vocabulary and reading and academic ability. There is a slight preference made

to studies by McGuinness and colleagues in the provision of counter evidence in this section, a regrettable tendency observed also in the first companion volume *Early Reading Instruction* (2004). While the correlation between syntax and reading skill is supported methodologically, the summary provides a caution and reminder that reading researchers have not yet been able to answer all of the important questions, or rather have not asked the poignant questions about the nature of learning to read.

The final chapter provides a convincing conclusion of the premise made throughout the book, namely the need to further the scientific quantitative inquiry into reading by increased innovative and applied research conducted globally. McGuinness states that this success is contingent upon collaborative efforts in areas outside the traditional institution of reading instruction, for example, with that of psycholinguistics and developmental psychology. A due recognition here to the globally acknowledged work of Professor Max Coltheart, ARC Federation Fellow and Director of the Macquarie Centre for Cognitive Science, could broaden the spectrum of the book and substantiate more scientific evidence in reading. The omission of Prof. Coltheart's recognised publications and contribution to the field of cognitive neuroscience on literacy, is indeed somewhat surprising.

The straightforward textual approach and clear argumentative style of this book would make it suitable as undergraduate and postgraduate text material in language and literacy and related studies. If offered in the discipline of education and teacher education however, its strong emphasis on quantitative research paradigms would need to be counterbalanced with qualitative paradigms, which are more prevalent and more readily applied in many fields of educational research today, including language and literacy studies (see e.g., Freebody, 2003). This would possibly yield the book a broader readership and wider market specifically in the interdisciplinary field of education.

In sum, the book provides ample detailed evidence from cited research to illustrate its premise. It makes for intriguing reading, which confronts taken for granted assumptions and takes the reader to scholarly notions of knowledge and inquiry in nurturing new thinking and progressive thought. It is most certainly a recommended read.

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Reviewed by Dr. Meeri Hellsten, School of Education, ACES, Macquarie University, NSW 2109, Australia. Email: meeri.hellsten@mq.edu.au

Perfect, Kathy A. (2005) *Poetry Lessons: Everything You Need*. New York: Scholastic.

Kathy Perfect's book, *Poetry Lessons*, is a wonderful resource from beginning to end and is intended for all teachers, grades 4 and up, who wish to invite poetry into their classrooms. Exclaiming that "help-and hope-is on the way" she champions the cause of poetry as a renewed method of exploring worlds in the language arts to develop student literacy skills, writing, and reflection. This book addresses both the novice and the experienced teacher, asking all to "take the plunge" into poetry. Perfect uses her own personal stories of practical application, anecdotes, everyday language, and excellent explanations to help teachers hone their poetry teaching skills. She provides the reader with a clear picture of how to use her ideas to develop literacy skills, writing, and reflection as well as incorporate poetry into other content areas, including the arts.

I was excited to find clearly outlined topics addressing the why, when, and how of using poetry. She introduces how to teach poetic elements, generate enthusiasm, and connect poetry to everyday student experiences. She also gives examples of the how-to—in leading students in creating poetry, and the how-to—in incorporating it with other content. Perfect takes us on a journey through whole class discussion, peer led discussions and groups, and focuses on making connections to the students' "lived-through experience." She

provides definitions of genres and includes several examples from all types of poetry, including the classics and student poetry. Trying out her fourth chapter, "Our Turn to Create", I was surprised to find out how enthusiastic my students were about trying out the different approaches to creating poetry, especially when they had opportunities to share and compare what they wrote.

Kathy Perfect, without a doubt, gives us the tools to use poetry without excuse, and guides us into understanding and teaching with poetry in very profound and powerful ways. The insightful and fun nature of exploring and teaching poetry is evidenced in this book. It invites creativity in teaching and learning by including activities appropriate to a multitude of teaching constraints and freedoms. After reading this informative and practical book, I felt like I was a poetry expert. Perfect's passion for poetry shows, and her enthusiasm rubs off. Bravo!

Pages: **128** Price: **\$17.99** ISBN: **0439491576**

Reviewed by Heidi Mullins, Lecturer, College of Education-Art Education, University of Houston.

Shaw, Darla (2005). *Retelling Strategies to Improve Comprehension: Effective Hands-On Strategies for Fiction and Nonfiction That Help Students Remember and Understand What They Read*. New York: Scholastic.

Darla Shaw provides a new addition to the library of strategies that assist educators in teaching reading comprehension to students. Shaw chooses to focus on one stage of the reading process – retelling. The primary purpose of retelling is to allow the students to create their own understanding of the text being read, whether fiction or nonfiction, and relate it to prior knowledge. Shaw states that students need to be taught the organizing tools to help them decide which information to look for when reading. These tools will also assist students in explaining the story and responding to questions.

Shaw's strategies are based on the creation of props to aid the students in an oral retelling of the reading (the oral retelling can be in small or large groups). These props rely heavily on kinesthetic and visual tools. For example, Shaw illustrates how to construct a category lantern. Students write the main idea on the outer side of the lantern and details are hidden on the inside. This strategy also requires the teacher to assist in brainstorming four main ideas or topics prior to the reading. Shaw also makes the poignant assertion that not all students need to learn how to retell. These strategies should be used according to the strengths of the students.

Retelling Strategies to Improve Comprehension is a wonderful collection of strategies that educators can use or adapt for the primary through intermediate grades. Shaw's directions are easy to follow and the strategies are well explained, which makes it accessible to busy educators.

Pages: **96** Price: **\$15.99** ISBN: **0-439-56035-7**

Reviewed by Karen Csolli, PhD candidate in Curriculum Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. She also works with university students with learning disabilities, teaching them study strategies.

Silverman, Franklin H. (2004). *Self-Publishing Textbooks and Instructional Materials: A Practical Guide to Successful – and Respectable – Self-Publishing*. Gloucester, MA: Atlantic Path Publishing.

Dr. Silverman opens this significant book with the necessary assertion that self-published books can be academically respectable, if carefully planned and executed. He, thereby, addresses one of the strongest biases against self-publishing. In his discourse he offers examples of how many academicians self-publish regularly, including the widely accepted practice of distributing conference papers or pre-prints. Silverman establishes that given the current, sometimes unreceptive, state of commercial publishing, self-publishing is often a necessary, expedient and highly desirable avenue for distributing reputable information.

This text provides an insider's look at the publishing world and the many financial and marketing hurdles encountered in traditional publishing arenas that may make self-publishing an attractive alternative for some authors. Silverman provides valuable insight into the benefits and risks of self-publishing. The discussion of benefits includes commentary on the form, length and longevity of the product – all critical issues that usually

fall outside of the author's sphere of influence in traditional publishing agreements. Significant risks exist when one decides to self publish and these are discussed in detail as well. These potential perils include financial risks which arise from establishing a publishing company and funding printing and marketing costs; the time drain of production and publication tasks; and ultimately the potential risk of damaging your professional reputation if you self-publish substandard products. Fortunately, Silverman also offers antidotes to some of the most hazardous risks, including suggesting that self-published materials undergo meticulous peer review to avoid the danger of issuing a second-rate publication.

After having guided the reader through the decision of whether self-publishing is a viable option, the author proceeds to steer the reader step-by-step through the stages involved in producing an academically respectable publication and navigating the self-publishing process. Silverman delineates 11 tasks involved in the self-publishing process and dedicates one chapter to describing in full each of the tasks. His coverage is comprehensive and extends far beyond the expected guidelines for authoring such a publication to include adept descriptions of establishing an independent small press, designing book or media covers, obtaining copyrights, marketing, financial reporting and selling reprint rights.

Finally, in recognition that the tips contained within the book are likely to be beneficial for publications other than academic books, Silverman ends the book by including a chapter on self-publishing trade books for a general audience. In this discussion, he highlights the differences between publishing academic and trade books and offers tips for safely navigating self-publication of a successful trade book by an academic author.

Self-Publishing Textbooks and Instructional Materials is both a how-to guide and a publishing mentor in book form. Silverman ends each chapter with an abridged list of key factors, a checklist or a list of additional resources. This end-of-chapter précis is effective and provides access to an additional wealth of information for the self-publisher.

This book is a must-have handbook for any academician considering self-publishing. Not only will this serve as a useful guide for determining whether self-publishing is the right avenue for a potential author; but for those having decided to proceed with self-publishing a project, this guide will prove an invaluable resource from start to finish.

Pages: **186** Price: **\$32.95** ISBN: **0-9728164-3-7**

Reviewed by Beronda Montgomery, Ph.D., Michigan State University

Sullivan, Jane & Madden, Midge (2004). *Teaching the Elements of Powerful Writing: Using Great Fiction and Nonfiction Models*. New York: Scholastic.

"What is it that teachers must do to help children want to write and to become good at writing?" It is this question that the authors see as the central focus for this grades 3 – 5 resource book. It offers lessons that can be picked up for immediate classroom use, adapted, or used as models for teachers to generate other writing lessons.

There are three chapters (writing memoir, writing fiction, writing nonfiction) and each follows a similar pattern. The initial information is a glimpse into a classroom where the text type is being used. We hear the conversations of young writers as they generate ideas, as they write, and as they discuss their own writing and that of published writers. We are then introduced to the characteristics of the text type, recommendations of examples that can be used to illustrate the form and then some techniques that are commonly found in the type of writing. These techniques are very general but on the whole are tackled in more detail later in the chapter where there are sample lessons.

Stating that they are working from a genre studies viewpoint, the writers work their way through a process of deconstruction (using what the authors call 'touchstone' or 'mentor' texts), teacher modeling construction with some co-construction with students (which helps them to generate ideas) and on to student independent construction. What I liked about this method was that it is based on a widely accepted and understood process teachers in many countries use.

The lessons themselves are very clearly laid out. There is a list of resources needed and what follows is a process where short classroom conversations (called the narrative sections by the authors) are used to illustrate points in the highlighted step boxes alongside. Each of these step boxes provides advice on procedure and gives the teacher's purpose in doing the step. At times the narratives provide student templates to scaffold learning and student production, examples of what some students did with these templates, checklists to help teachers (for example things to draw attention to when teaching) and checklists

for students (such as the one on how to remember the spelling of new items). At other times the narratives show teaching strategies such as 'think alouds' where students are privy to the thinking the teacher is doing as teacher construction takes place.

I do however have a few quibbles about the book. The main one is the use of the term "genre." In the introduction the authors define genre as "a framework that will fit the writer's purpose" (p7). The authors then go on to "include three genres in this book: memoir, fiction, and nonfiction" (p7). However a memoir (or a fiction or nonfiction piece) is not a purpose. The purpose in a memoir, one could argue, is to narrate. A genre approach to writing shows our students how text is developed for particular purposes. The memoir is a text type within the genre that has the purpose to narrate. Again, nonfiction is not a genre. Within nonfiction we have genres with purposes such as to instruct, to explain and to argue. Within each of these there are many different products or text types, such as procedural text, expository text and explanatory accounts.

The lack of any guidelines for assessing student writing based on what has been taught and ideas for next steps, that is, the more formal aspects of feedback and feedforward for students, is also a shortcoming in this text. I would also have liked to see some advice to teachers as to which students would benefit most from the sample lessons. Some students will need more challenge while others will require more scaffolding. Such advice could have been based on the language content or text types of the lessons.

We also have a book with a title that includes *Using great fiction and nonfiction models*. While the preliminary words in each chapter give titles of published works that could be used as examples, the lessons themselves have examples written by the book's authors. More consistency with their own advice and title would have been welcomed here.

Having said this though, I believe teachers will appreciate the inclusion of appendices of recommended books to help exemplification, the list of books that contain ideas on the teaching of writing (though there is a dearth of those writers, particularly the Australians, who have done much in the area of genre teaching) and the three completed student-writing examples.

Whether the book achieves its purpose in helping students *want* to write is debatable. However it does give ideas on how to make writing better, and it certainly follows a thorough approach to the writing process with previsioning, visioning and revisioning being demonstrated.

Teachers new to the writing process will find this approach very helpful, those wanting some new teaching strategies will find something in here to satisfy them and teachers wanting to deliver the lessons as they are will also have a good resource.

Pages: 127 Price: \$17.99 ISBN: 0-439-51781-8

Reviewed by Judine Ladbrook, Principal Lecturer, Centre for Language and Languages, The University of Auckland.

Wood, George H. (2005). *Time To Learn: How to Create High Schools That Serve All Students*. Second edition. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Time to Learn is a very good read because it offers hope for high school reform. George Wood based this book on his experiences as principal of Federal Hocking High School in Stewart, Ohio. By today's standards, his school has a very small enrollment with little diversity among students and staff. So naturally, one of the arguments one would pose is that what Wood does in his school can't be duplicated in much larger high schools with greater diversity among the students and staff. But as the author points out, those are just excuses that keep us from personalizing the educational experiences of every student.

Most high school reform efforts have failed miserably. We seem determined to make sure one curriculum, one standard, fits every child. Wood does a good job of breaking down the 5,000 hours a typical student spends in high school. He takes the reader through the history of how the Carnegie unit was developed (A unit of credit for college preparatory coursework. Each unit represents a year's course in a recognized subject). Surprisingly, we still adhere to that system which was developed over 100 years ago, further illustrating our lack of flexibility in developing high schools that are student centered rather than course centered.

Students at Federal Hocking High School are engaged in the learning process. They make decisions that meet their individual needs, but with the guidance of caring and dedicated faculty members. Sure, the school is small in size, but it is a great argument that most of our high schools are too large. In order to make

schools a rewarding experience for our students, drastic changes must take place. Maybe this isn't the answer, but it sure is a good start.

Time to Learn is full of examples of how to fully involve students. It gives the reader a step-by-step process for how one school got great results. The author recommends beginning with what we want our graduates to do, and plan the curriculum backward from there. He also gives the reader ideas on how to go around the roadblocks that constantly prevent us from deviating from the routine when trying new things.

This book should provide the motivation to try something different. It presents a very good case that maybe we should consider making our high schools much smaller and more manageable. A great resource tool for today's high school principal. It will give readers hope that students are good and that they will respond positively if they are connected to the school.

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Pages: **216** Price: **\$22.50** ISBN: **0-325-00808-6**

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