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Brief reviews for November 2007

Alley, Marybeth & Orehovec, Barbara (2007). *Revisiting the Writing Workshop: Management, Assessment, and Mini- Lessons. Grades 1-5*. New York: Scholastic.

Pages: 160 Price: \$19.99 ISBN: 978-0439926430

The teaching of writing has changed over the years. In the past, writing was not taught; it was assigned and corrected. Teachers emphasized the final product of writing, not the process which produced it (Calkins, 1986; Willis, 2001). By the late 1970's, the emphasis had changed and the process writing movement began (Willis, 2001). The process writing approach, first developed by Graves in 1983, focused on instruction, which allowed teachers to help students brainstorm ideas, solicit feedback, revise their work, then edit and proofread the final product before publishing (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983; Willis, 2001). This type of writing process, usually through writing workshops, provided children with numerous opportunities to practice and internalize what goes into a piece of writing just as a professional author does (Wong-Kam & Vasquez, 2003). Writing workshop is an interactive approach to teaching writing in which students learn and practice the importance of rehearsal, drafting/revising, and editing their own work (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983). The literature is very thorough in presenting encouraging success stories of the writing workshop; however, the establishment of the writing workshop can feel risky to new teachers since there is no prescribed sequence for teaching skills and strategies and there is the possibility of students being off-task during the writing time (Sudol & Sudol, 2001). Not anymore...

In their latest book *Revisiting the Writing Workshop*, Alley and Orehovec, two mentor teachers share their classroom-tested procedures and successful mini-lessons on writing craft, genre, and revision. Breaking down the components of the writing workshop, including every little detail from scheduling and strategy mini-lessons to hand-chosen book lists and assessment ideas, checklists and rubrics, the authors allow teachers to implement their own workshops in their own classrooms with little to no stress and definitely more ease.

For ease of comprehension, this book has a straightforward structure in which each individual step building a successful workshop is distinguished. The authors of the book start with the overall structure of writing workshop by providing information about the basic elements (mini-lesson, independent writing and conferring, sharing and reflection) and giving the rationale for using writing workshop supported by the literature and latest research. By providing their real own classroom examples, item checklists, and assessment rubrics, the rest of the book describes how educators can design and implement the successful and effective writing workshop.

Probably the only recommendation I can make for improving this book is to suggest that in their next edition of this book the authors think about adding directions and strategies on implementing writing workshop for teachers of students from diverse cultures and/or students who are English language learners—something that would make an already excellent reference even better.

Revisiting the Writing Workshop is definitive in its description of the process and thorough in helping educators learn how to begin, implement, follow-through, and evaluate the success of a writing workshop. The book is well-organized, with clear headings and subheadings that make it easy to read and to reference. This book is full of practical ideas, tips, and suggestions on how to foster students' writing. The authors capitalize on their actual experiences to validate their conclusions. This book can definitely serve as an outstanding tool for anyone choosing to conduct a writing workshop.

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Wong-Kam, J., & Vasquez, V. (2003). Writing today: Between the ideal and the real world of teaching. *School Talk*, 9(1), 1-7.

Reviewed by Dr. Zafer Unal, Assistant Professor, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg

Cecil, Nancy Lee (2007) *Striking a Balance: Best Practices for Early Literacy*. Third edition. Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway Publishers.

Pages: 396 Price: \$40.95 ISBN: 978-1-890871-78-9

It seems that everyone has an opinion about how children should be taught to read; *Hooked on Phonics* and similar products are marketed directly to parents as a solution for their child's reading difficulties. Cecil brings some order to this chaos of opinions by focusing on practices that either have been tested through research or identified by practitioners who have a track record of helping children with reading difficulties.

The title, *Striking a Balance*, alludes to the old argument as to whether phonics or whole-language is the best method for teaching children to read. Chapter 2 discusses the history of reading instruction in the United States, providing a context for some of the opinions regarding reading instruction that one still encounters today.

Designed primarily as a textbook for the pre-service teacher on reading instruction in the primary grades, several features will aid the student in digesting the information provided. A list of focus questions precedes each chapter. Chapters begin with an "In the Classroom" example of effective teaching in action. This is followed by a discussion of research and recommendations along with suggested activities for effectively teaching the various concepts. Each chapter concludes with questions for discussion and suggestions for projects and field activities.

Attention is given to English language learners, with activities of particular use for this group noted. An example of the eminently practical nature of this book is the table of English phonemes that do not appear in selected other languages. The unique needs of urban children as they acquire literacy are also addressed. A concluding chapter reinforces the need for parents and other caregivers to partner with the teacher in helping the child to become literate. Suggestions for effective ways of reaching reluctant parents are provided.

For a textbook, *Striking a Balance* packs an amazing amount of information into a relatively short number of pages. A "List of Activities" organized by chapter follows the Table of Contents and will aid the practicing teacher in the use of this book as a reference tool. Helpful appendices provide such items as: lists of children's books for various teaching strategies; recommended books for teachers; websites for use with students or as aids to the teacher; lists of commercial and informal assessment instruments; lists of rhyming and common words; and a copy of Fry's Readability Graph.

New features of this third edition include a new chapter on reading and writing informational texts; updates of research, suggested activities, and assessments; and a discussion of the impact of technology on literacy and instruction.

While novice teachers will particularly benefit from Cecil's well researched and written overview of reading instruction, experienced teachers will also find the book useful as an overview of recent research and a source of new ideas. Student teachers who have this as a textbook will want to hang on to the book for reference as they begin their teaching careers. At \$40.95 for the paper edition, students will find this to be one of the best textbook investments they make.

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Hooked on Phonics. (1988-2005 for various levels and editions). Was Foster City, CA: Gateway Learning Products; now Baltimore, MD: HOP.

Reviewed by Christina Cicchetti, Education/Reference Librarian, University of California Riverside.

Cutter, Joseph (2007) *Independent Movement and Travel in Blind Children: A Promotion Model*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Pages: 331 Price: 978-1-59311-603-3 ISBN: \$39.99

With passion and conviction, Joseph Cutter speaks to Orientation and Movement (O&M) practitioners— and students, parents, and teachers —through his child-centered model for enhancing the movement skills of blind children. His model promotes the cultivation of alternative skills of blindness, namely the use of a cane. According to Cutter, a cane "connects, protects, detects, informs, explores, and makes for more efficient travel" (p. 68). He advocates using a cane to support movement development well before walking. These pre-cane skills can be learned by even the youngest blind children through the use of a teaching cane that sets the stage for independent cane use to support travel and movement.

Unlike traditional O&M models that represent the perspective of adults who have lost or are losing vision, Cutter's model truly focuses on the needs of blind children. Cutter, an O&M practitioner for over three decades, challenges conventional adult-centered O&M practices through what he terms a "Promotion Model," a solution-oriented approach that encourages activities that promote independence in blind children. Blending his understanding of theoretical approaches and his vast personal experience in the field, Cutter's Promotion Model inspires hope and focuses on gaining skills, not on the loss of vision.

Cutter addresses the use of the term "blind" in the opening pages of the book. Where the term "visual impairment" suggests a deficit of some kind, Cutter instead employs the term blind for two primary reasons. First, based on his experience with the blind community, the term blind is preferred. Second, Cutter believes that using the term visual impairment reinforces deficit-thinking that can influence the thoughts and actions of blind children, their peers and parents, and others who support and teach them. Cutter's consistent message of independence and equality is refreshing. Writing about the alternative skills of blindness, he encourages blind children to become early and efficient travelers. Although blind children may acquire and use information differently than sighted children, this kind of difference should not be considered a deficiency. Using echolocation, for instance, provides information that a blind child needs in order to understand and navigate the world.

Even though there is wide variation in child development, some are quick to assume that any developmental variation or perceived delay in a blind child is due to the blindness itself. This is not the case according to Cutter. Age/stage appropriate development experiences are not delayed due to blindness, but rather to the absence of critical movement experiences. Using the example of voice-face synchrony where sighted children use auditory and visual senses to verify information (for example a parent's face), Cutter describes how blind children pair auditory, touch, or smell senses to verify information. Parents can help blind children achieve this important developmental milestone by encouraging blind children to verify information using these three senses. Readers will find the guide to age/state appropriate skills for a variety of settings as well as the specific cane techniques quite useful.

Throughout the book, Cutter reinforces the importance of parents as the blind child's first teacher. He advocates for "role release" where O&M practitioners empower parents to teach their blind children using practical O&M skills. A significant portion of the book is devoted to a pictorial guide with descriptions of how blind children learn independent movement and travel skills. The photos, many of them depicting parents teaching O&M skills, vividly demonstrate how the goals of the Promotion Model can be achieved.

The book is well-organized, with clear headings and subheadings that make it easy to read and to reference. O&M professionals and students along with those involved in early intervention programs will find that the Promotion Model provides concrete ways to encourage blind children to move beyond what many sighted people consider boundaries and into independence.

Reviewed by Shannon Alpert, doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

**Dennison, Paul E. (2006). *Brain Gym and Me: Reclaiming the Pleasure of Learning*.
Ventura, CA: Edu- Kinesthetics.**

Pages: 266 Price: \$19.95 ISBN: 0-9421143-11-6

To many people unfamiliar with Brain Gym, the sight of children standing in a circle and touching their elbows to opposite knees might seem an activity completely unrelated to improving their ability to read. But to practitioners working in direct service to young people with difficulties in learning (whether within the category of Special Education in schools or outside the field in private consultation), the Brain Gym program has earned its international reputation and following fair and square. As a remedy for a diverse array of learning impediments from dyslexia to attention-deficit disorder, the gross- motor exercises designed to repair and rejuvenate damaged or unused neural pathways are extremely simple to execute and practice by parents, teachers, and children alike.

In this book, Brain Gym co-creator Paul Dennison (his wife Gail is his collaborator) shares this story of the genesis of Brain Gym in parallel to the narrative of his own personal growth as a scholar. The author of several books on whole-brain learning, Dennison has developed a battery of materials for teachers and students alike, but this book in particular offers autobiographical details that make personal his subject matter.

Dennison's account of his arrested development as a reader is examined in terms of his relationship to his physical body and emerging proprioception. The child of artistic parents growing up during the tail end of World War II, Dennison experienced acute shame and anxiety early on at school as a result of his treatment at the hands of his classroom teacher. Because of his difficulty reading and writing, Paul Dennison was often singled out and shamed by his teacher. With exposure to extracurricular experiences and a new classroom teacher, Dennison noticed that when he felt physically relaxed, supported, and secure, he was able to engage emotionally and intellectually with his environment, and vice-versa. This new-found confidence in his learning finally allowed Dennison to thrive academically.

The desire to help struggling readers in particular led Dennison to a private practice as a reading specialist in the 1970s, but he soon began to look to the field of neuroscience for inspiration as he noticed familiar patterns repeating themselves with his clients: tightened back and neck muscles correlating with difficulties in decoding written language, and the inability to cross the midline with the eyes as a symptom of dyslexia, for example. Memories of his own long journey to become a skilled reader surface throughout the book and accompany a wide array of case studies and in-depth discussion of the neuroscience behind the Brain Gym program.

Dennison's writing is uncomplicated, familiar, and accessible and, due the relaxed tenor of the narrative, may have wide appeal for direct service professionals as well as researchers. Those professionals who have developed remedial or therapeutic programs for children and adults may find much in Dennison's narrative that resonates with their own experience, and this may increase the appeal of the book for them.

The serendipitous discoveries and synchronous program development described here may seem alien to denizens of the agitated world of educational research, however. Some may not subscribe to the idea that pleasure and learning should be inextricable, for example. But Dennison's books and their appeal are internationally known, and have made inroads into practice in a way much research-validated intervention has not. The research supporting Dennison's work is abundant, and has been replicated internationally, giving Brain Gym a social validity thumbs-up from the grass roots contingent: parents and children. (For the curious, the book also contains a snapshot of some Brain Gym exercises, with photos and instructions.)

To say that Paul Dennison found a way to integrate learning and relaxation may be a little one-dimensional. He describes the development of a program of neurological repatterning that allows individuals to integrate themselves, to bring mindfulness and delight to their daily routine, and to provide relief to children who experience learning difficulties in and out of school. This book is Dennison's celebration of that journey, and it has arrived at an excellent time in our educational history. With schools, districts, and states more concerned than ever with deciphering arcane and formulaic standards of achievement as well as the resulting pressure on students to learn by rote, Dennison's story is a good reminder that the best, most permanent, enriching pedagogy is one that happens in an encouraging, pleasurable, and holistic context.

**Reviewed by Gita Upreti, MA, Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Special Education,
University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ**

Diller, Debbie (2007). *Making the Most of Small Groups: Differentiation for All*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Pages: 224 Price: \$22.00 ISBN: 978-I-57110-431-1

Making the Most of Small Groups: Differentiation for All is an extremely well-organized "how-to" manual for any teacher of reading whose students display a wide range of learning needs and abilities. And anyone who teaches knows, of course, that this is a fitting description for just about any group of students that has ever crossed the threshold of a classroom; therefore, this book is a must-have for the vast majority of teachers interested in developing and honing their skills at delivering differentiated instruction.

The book contains two parts: eight chapters that contain the actual content followed by seven appendices that are perfectly aligned with chapters two through eight. For example, Chapter Two and Appendix A are entitled Organizing and pertain to the organization of reading instruction, Chapter Three and Appendix B are entitled Grouping and pertain to the painstaking thought and planning that must precede the actual implementation of student groups in reading instruction, and so forth.

According to author Debbie Diller, the purpose of small group instruction is to meet the individual needs of each student and to accelerate learning. While the main focus of this book is small group instruction, it also explicitly addresses whole group and one-on-one instruction by providing innumerable strategies and tools for organizing teacher work in ways that promote the addressing of individual student needs via a variety of groupings and best practices.

Author Diller reports that she dreamed the table of contents one night and awoke to jot down the eight chapter titles that form the framework for her tome: Time, Organizing, Grouping, Comprehension, Fluency, Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, and Vocabulary. In each chapter she includes explicit direction on how to implement every step of planning and executing reading lessons while ensuring that instruction promotes deep thinking among students. "Focus is key in small group teaching" (p. 11) she declares, yet she urges teachers to remain flexible so as to ensure that they make every grouping count.

In addition to a multitude of explicit instructions (including lesson and work plans) on how to maximize the power of small group instruction in reading, there is a meta-cognitive element infused throughout Diller's book. It is evident that the author has a deep and thorough understanding of, and expertise in, the teaching of reading and that she is able to communicate all levels of this know-how to the reader. *Making the Most of Small Groups: Differentiation for All* gets to the heart of the matter and provides all the tools needed to teachers seeking to hone their pedagogical skills in the teaching of reading.

Reviewed by Harriet R. MacLean, Ed. D., Middle Schools Network Executive Officer in Oakland Unified School District, Oakland, California. Her research interests include student motivation and issues affecting the success of young adolescents in urban middle schools.

Education Week (2007). *The Last Word: The Best Commentary and Controversy in American Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pages: 244 Price: \$19.95 ISBN: 978-0-7879-9606-2

This is a collection of 42 *Education Week* commentaries, selected by Mary-Ellen Phelps Deily and Veronika Herman Bromberg of Editorial Projects in Education. It celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of that publication. There are between four and seven essays, averaging three to four pages, in each of nine thematic sections:

- The Art of Teaching
- Equity and Social Justice
- Testing Well, Testing Fairly
- Curriculum in the Classroom
- Technology and Learning
- Democracy and Virtue
- Change and Reform
- Charters and Choice
- Inspiring Leadership

The earliest essay dates back to 1982, but in almost all cases there is a one paragraph update by the original

author written specifically for this collection.

There is a brief Foreword by Jay Mathews, an education columnist for the Washington Post, who unfortunately closes his comments by saying, "...readers of this book are under no such obligation [i.e., to cite their sources]. Take whatever you like here and adopt it as your own. Your friends, like mine, will think you are much more clever than you actually are. What's wrong with that?" Aside from the implicit encouragement of plagiarism, this seems a somewhat sideways insult, suggesting that readers aren't smart enough to incorporate insights gained from reading these essays into their framework of knowledge and experience to create new ideas and solutions. The Preface by the Editorial Director of Education Week Press, Ms. Deily, outlines some of the selection process but only vaguely refers to "the power of the questions" raised and the importance of the writers to tell us why these particular essays and these particular topics.

I also found it somewhat annoying that no mention was made of the fact that most living authors appear to have been asked to provide a short comment on the current status of the issue they wrote about in their commentary. Although one can figure this out if one notices that the introductory paragraphs are identified with initials that in most cases match the name of the commentary author, it would have been a courtesy to alert readers to the structure of the text. Somewhat confusing as well is the fact that each pre-essay paragraph is immediately followed by a "Published ___Date___" which refers, not to the preceding paragraph, but rather to the original essay which follows. The reader can sometimes ascertain from the content of the pre-paragraph that it couldn't possibly match the date and, of course, one can go back to the table of contents to determine that the date in question actually refers to the essay itself. For my money, the update would make much more sense after the essay so that the context has been set. These are all just annoying issues of format. Each essay is followed by a two to three sentence professional biography of the author.

Formatting grievances aside, the collection itself is very good, and very dense. Imagine all these really bright people—like Howard Gardner, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Bill Clinton, and Robert Stenberg—condensing their best thoughts on issues of great concern to them into three or four pages and then grouping these together so that one can read through 42 of them! Maybe some intrepid scholars are able to do this but I wasn't and I wouldn't recommend it. Taken a chunk or two at a time, however, this collection is brilliantly suited for provoking thoughtful consideration of issues that resonate as urgently today as when they were written. In all too many cases, the author's update includes the lament, "not much has changed" in the five, ten or twenty years since this was written. As Bill Clinton points out in his essay on leadership, these are thorny issues that can't be adequately addressed in a short time; they require our sustained attention and creativity and passion.

Reading a range of essays on a topic from this collection would be an appropriate pedagogical strategy not only for teacher educators but also for those guiding future educational administrators. Contrasting viewpoints are offered that are bound to stimulate rousing discussion. Some of these commentaries would inform students of almost any social science. For example, Lee Shulman's essay on research-based policies admonishes that, "evidence alone never tells the story," but requires critical examination and informed judgment before it can be truly useful. Of course anyone who wants to be apprised of the scope of ideas surrounding key educational issues can benefit from dipping into this hearty buffet of positions and propositions, be they parent, teacher, or concerned citizen; for, we all have – or should have – a vested interest in this public good called education.

Reviewed by Paula McMillen, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Social Science Reference Librarian at Oregon State University Libraries and adjunct to the OSU College of Education.

Flockhart, Dan (2007). *Fantasy Soccer and Mathematics: A Resource Guide for Teachers and Parents, Grades 5 and Up*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.

Pages: 192 Price: \$24.95 ISBN: 0-978-7879-9446-4.

In the September 2007 edition of these brief reviews, Carol Rodano presents a thorough review of *Fantasy Baseball and Mathematics*, a parallel volume to the one reviewed here (<http://edrev.asu.edu/brief/sept07.html#4>). *Fantasy Soccer and Mathematics* is the same curriculum with identical learning goals, tasks, and performance assessments; the major difference is the content, as indicated by the titles. Rodano does a nice job in her review of describing the curriculum and situating it within the context of classrooms, pointing out why this book seems especially teacher-friendly. As a compliment to Rodano's comments, in this review I will focus on the research context around fantasy sports, mathematics, and learning. It is my hope that readers will walk away from this review with an understanding of why Flockhart's books are powerful

classroom curricular designs for middle school students.

Understanding games, specifically digital games, as powerful mechanisms for learning is a growing field of research. We are beginning to recognize the many hours kids spend playing games from card games like *Yugioh* to massively multiplayer online games like *World of Warcraft* as worthwhile. Engagement with games involves much more than staring open-mouthed at a television; kids acquire and use the kinds of literacy skills we expect students to demonstrate in the classroom, including making sense of complex technical texts, producing original texts that have been revised over extended periods of time, making predictions, and testing assumptions (for a good introduction to what kids learn from video games, see Gee, 2003).

Fantasy sports games (which include every sport you can imagine, including the sports Flockhart has used for his curricula) engage players in the literacy skills described above, but are uniquely suited to mathematics in that the primary task of game play is fundamentally statistical. Fantasy players (called "Managers") study large bodies of historical statistical data (in the case of fantasy soccer, individual soccer players' performance across a variety of categories) and then make predictions about which players will fare the best in the current season. Research on fantasy basketball and fantasy baseball game play has demonstrated that they reinforce basic statistical concepts such as sample size, prediction, and modeling (Halverson & Halverson, forthcoming, Smith, Sharma, & Hooper, 2006). *Fantasy Soccer and Mathematics* takes these concepts much further by engaging students in the formalization of these skills with specific activities and quizzes that encourage students to relate the informal math of fantasy sports to formal graphing and problem solving.

In fact, the bridge created by Flockhart's curriculum fills a crucial void that researchers have found exists between students' informal mathematical knowledge that they use in authentic contexts and the formal math we expect them to use in school. Na'ilah Nasir's work with high school boys who play basketball demonstrated their ability to employ statistical skills such as calculating percentages and estimating in the context of game play but not in the context of the math classroom (Nasir, 2000). *Fantasy Soccer and Mathematics* (and its accompanying titles) provides that bridge for students by combining the engagement of game play, the authentic context of real sports data, and formal mathematical activities and exercises.

It is also possible that this *Fantasy Soccer* curriculum will engage a broader variety of students than Flockhart's two other volumes, *Fantasy Baseball* and *Fantasy Football*. These second two sports are currently the most popular fantasy sports games on the market and are predominantly played by white males. Given soccer's broad appeal as a sport, teachers who want to use this curriculum to engage all of their students may want to try *Fantasy Soccer and Mathematics*.

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Nasir, N. S. (2000). "Points ain't everything": Emergent goals and average and percent understandings in the play of basketball among African American students. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 31(3), 283-305.

Smith, B., Sharma, P., and Hooper, P. (2006). Decision making in online fantasy sports communities. *Interactive Technology and Smart Education*, 4, 347-360.

Reviewed by Erica Halverson, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, School of Education, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Haynie, John (2007). *Inside John Haynie's Studio: A Master Teacher's Lessons on Trumpet and Life*. Essays by John, Compiled and Edited by Anne Hardin. Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press.

Pages: 290 Price: \$27.95 ISBN: 9781574412260

John Haynie, Professor Emeritus of The University of North Texas, is recognized as one of the great music teachers of our times. His skills as a performer and gifted teacher of trumpet players is universally recognized and praised. This book of essays about musical performance and approaches to life and teaching reveals his solutions to most musical problems. His teaching of what he calls "The Big Four" (Embouchure,

Breath, Tongue, Fingers) presents trumpet teachers and band directors with practical guidelines to effective teaching. His essays are supplemented with brief remembrances by former students, including some of our finest trumpet performers and teachers

Like John Haynie, I am not prone to excess verbiage. In summary, I simply say that this book should be in the library of all those who aspire to play or teach the trumpet and those who conduct bands

Reviewed by Gordon Mathie, Professor Emeritus, The State University of New York

Larner, Marjorie (2007). *Tools for Leaders: Indispensable Graphic Organizers, Protocols, and Planning Guidelines for Working and Learning Together*. New York: Scholastic.

Pages: 175 Price: \$19.99 ISBN: 978-0-439-02427-3

Marorie Larner's book, *Tools for Leaders: Indispensable Graphic Organizers, Protocols, and Planning Guidelines for Working and Learning Together* provides templates for planning and activities, and a standardized presentation of materials throughout the text. Including a list of references and an index, these twelve chapters will help guide a leader through implementing change in any setting, with examples drawn from K-12 environments. Furthermore, Larner also includes trouble-shooting guidelines and handouts to use in faculty development, all of which aid the understanding of the materials presented and assist in planning change. Although the suggested activities and charts can be made use of in certain situations, the organization of the materials makes it hard to follow the text itself, as there are often more images and figures than discussion. On the plus side, the judicious use of white space in the text enables the reader to easily take notes and follow along. The resources presented in this book were developed in the field, and will assist the user in following the step-by-step process of creating effective peer learning communities among the faculty and staff of an educational setting. Each chapter ends with field notes, discussing what Larner has learned through her experiences as a teacher, facilitator and administrator.

The book is divided into three thematic sections that progress logically along the change continuum. Part I begins by setting the tone for change, illustrating that not all settings will be best served by the same philosophy. Larner emphasizes the importance of setting the tone, as this is the building block upon which the remainder of the change will, or will not, occur. She then proceeds to discuss the logistics, again addressing various settings as not all districts, or even schools, are alike. Planning the logistics of change can take time, and only by preparing correctly can one move ahead with working together as desired. Larner's third chapter addresses "Big-Picture Planning and Assessing," a part that is often overlooked in the desire to jump right in. Having an final goal, and knowing how the progress will be assessed, is just as important as the steps taken toward that end. Ending the first part of the book is a chapter on agendas and evaluations, focusing on the smaller pictures, to plan out the changes in manageable steps, and to evaluate the each step of the agenda.

Moving on to Part II, the book changes focus from the foundations to "The Heart of the Conversation" between teachers working and learning together. Learning occurs only through sharing information, or conversing. The first step, and first chapter in this section, is to begin the communication. Sometimes the hardest thing to do is to say the first word, or to write the first sentence. In the same way, Larner begins by addressing how to start a conversation among participants. Once the conversation has progressed, agreements must be made to support the agreed upon purpose of the learning and change. In order for agreements to work, there must be active listening to the other members, or listening to each other. Agreeing and listening are steps along the way to developing positive working relationships, necessary for effective teaching and learning together. Part II ends with a discussion of issues and dilemmas that ultimately will arise, even in the best planned situations.

The book ends with Part III, "A Culture of Learning," which opens with a discussion of bringing new ideas into practice. By keeping abreast with the literature and work of others, participants can bring in ideas from others that might not have been thought of before. Classroom observations are discussed next, followed by a chapter discussing the student's view of the process and its outcomes.

Drawing on her extensive background as a teacher, administrator, facilitator for National School Reform Faculty, and former staff developer for the Denver-based Public Education and Business Coalition, Larner helps the leader who has a technical enough background to understand the terminology while at the same time providing materials to help the new leader.

Reviewed by Sara Marcus, Graduate School of Library and Information Studies, Queens College,

Flushing, New York.

Lybolt, John; Armstrong, Jennifer; Techmanski, Kristin Evans & Gottfred, Catherine (2007). *Building Language Throughout the Year: The Preschool Early Literacy Curriculum*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Pages: 436 Price: \$49.95 ISBN: 978-1-55766-780-9

Building Language Through the Years: The Preschool Early Literacy Curriculum is a valuable resource for the facilitation of language and literacy skill development for any preschool classroom. The focus on vocabulary in each of the lessons helps to address a key feature of literacy development that is often overlooked in other curricula. This emphasis is supported by a review of research included in the text with specific suggestions for teachers to follow to maximize the vocabulary development and subsequent learning taking place in their classrooms. The authors also provide definitions and descriptions of the teachers' roles in using the *Building Language Through the Years* curriculum, focusing on the need for assessment, preparation of the physical aspects of the learning environment, appropriate lesson planning, implementation of the lessons, and the importance of both explicit and opportunistic instruction to scaffold literacy learning.

Of note, the curriculum integrates as enrichment words more than 60% of the 1000 words used in conversation on a daily basis. Weekly language concept suggestions encompass language and literacy development and general cognitive development as well. Similarly, the *Building Language Through the Years* curriculum provides for socio-emotional development as well as early math and science skills, providing seamless assimilation of development of these concepts throughout the curriculum.

The introduction includes a table of Head Start domains related to language and literacy development, indicators for the domain, and how the domain is addressed through the use of this curriculum. Additional chapters provide helpful tables highlighting the skills used by successful kindergartners in a variety of literacy domains that are also addressed by the curriculum. This sets a framework for the curriculum while also drawing attention to the importance of implementation of the content.

The curriculum was developed with a typical early childhood classroom in mind, emphasizing the role of the curriculum within the existing preschool schedule. The curriculum supports the typical classroom function by providing suggestions for preliteracy activities as well as using dramatic play, group time, shared book reading, art, and music/rhythm activities suggestions for each day of the week. This curriculum highlights not only the importance of play in developing literacy skills, but it also helps to ensure the integration of language and literacy development in areas of early childhood education settings that can often go neglected. Most importantly, explicit information related to the instruction of language is provided, including techniques such as repeat-model-expand, think- and talk- alouds and the use of open-ended questions. Suggestions for and examples of using each technique are further elaborated to maximize teacher interactions with children.

There are 42 themed units included. Each unit begins with a weekly schedule that includes the language concepts of the week as well as the specific domains and abbreviated descriptions of activities within those domains. A bulleted list of components of the week's lesson is provided for teachers, with a brief research citation linking the activities with research-based practice and an additional list of aspects of the lesson that teachers have found through implementation (based on a previous pilot study). Antecedent pages provide more specific information for each activity as well as space for teacher notes, with a final page consisting of a one-page newsletter for parents.

Suggestions for working with parents through both sharing classroom activities and encouraging reinforcement of learning include specific suggestions for activities parents and children can enjoy at home. They will help parents realize the value of their role as the child's first and most important teacher. While a parent component is typical of many curricula of this nature, the explicit suggestions and the predominant theme of co-teaching offered here are a reflection of recent research suggesting the need for cooperation between home and school to develop language and literacy.

The *Building Language Through the Years* Curriculum Forms allow teachers to track the progress of individual children and include space for individualization of plans. Forms include the Teacher Observation Scale for Classroom Behavior providing a mechanism to track individual progress. This provides a critical instrument for differentiating learning while also empowering a teacher to track and monitor the progress of each student. A Table Talk Tally Sheet allows teachers to track conversations among children and adults, including an observation summary to note words and sentences heard within the conversations. A Parent Self-Observation Form further encourages the integration of parents into the curriculum, while a Teacher Self-Assessment form enables teachers to note the areas in which they can further develop to meet the needs of

the children they teach. These forms are not only useful, they underscore the deliberate nature of language and literacy development activities and capitalize on opportunistic moments for learning within preschool classrooms.

A list of suggested books and music is alphabetized by title in an index at the end, providing a quick and easily used reference. The chapters preceding the lessons are lengthy, yet provide a rationale for both the curriculum and its components as well as a framework for successful integration in the classroom. The authors also include the results of the comparison pilot study which suggests the curriculum was effective for the participants in the pilot study, but caution the need for additional research and further evaluation.

Overall, *Building Language Through the Years* is a helpful reference that can be used in any preschool classroom. Lybolt, Armstrong, Techmanski, and Gottfred have provided a practical set of lessons to develop language and literacy in the preschool classroom. The use of deliberate planning and careful implementation of lessons is based on noted research in emergent literacy development and provides an appropriate framework for the text.

Reviewed by Meagan Shedd, MS, CLE, doctoral student and research and teaching assistant in the Educational Psychology and Educational Technology program in the College of Education at Michigan State University.

McGregor, Tanny (2007). *Comprehension Connections: Bridges to Strategic Reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pages: 130 Price: \$17.50 ISBN: 0-325-00887-6

In *Comprehension Connections*, Tanny McGregor presents a resource for educators in developing effective curriculum plans to enhance reading comprehension for elementary readers. In this text, McGregor sets out to "provide concrete instruction that jump-starts (students) into the realm of strategic thinking" (p. xii), while incorporating successful strategies to help revitalize teachers. She uses this fundamental philosophy as a framework for helping educators develop curriculum plans to assist students in becoming better readers and thinkers.

Based on her nearly twenty years of experience as an educator, McGregor believes that by incorporating concrete items into the formal lesson plan, educators can provide a learning environment that may help students make abstract concepts become realities. Within the framework of developing reading skills and comprehension, McGregor shares some of her curriculum plans, lessons, activities, and projects to provide concrete examples for children as they develop skills as readers and thinkers.

McGregor introduces her four stage "launching sequence" consisting of *concrete experiences*, *sensory exercises*, *wordless picture books*, and *time for text* within a frame of seven fundamental concepts for developing strategic reading skills. These project-based lesson plans are designed to help students transition from an abstract and distant concept into a more tangible reading experience that incorporates strategic thinking about the reading while instilling a sense of independence for the developing reader.

The seven concepts are divided into chapters for easy identification and adaptation by the reader. They include Metacognition, Schema, Inferring, Questioning, Determining Importance, Visualizing, and Synthesizing. McGregor opens her chapters by reflecting on personal experience as a lifelong learner to introduce and connect her reading comprehension strategies. Each chapter incorporates the launching sequences framework for that particular lesson objective. To enhance each chapter-based lesson, McGregor also shares plausible curriculum examples with student feedback, famous quotes to motivate and stimulate readers, and a selective list of text resources for educators interested in delving deeper into the concept.

Overall the text is readily accessible to elementary educators and reading specialists who wish to revitalize their curriculum plans and methods for developing young readers. As one of McGregor's students commented, "reading is a pattern of text and thinking" (p. 16). In *Comprehension Connections*, McGregor has produced an applied text that provides educators with plausible examples and motivation for developing reading curriculum plans that may help students along the pathway to becoming strategic thinkers.

Reviewed by Philip E. Strong, Ph.D., Assistant Dean, Lyman Briggs College, Michigan State University.

Merrell, Kenneth W. (2007). *Strong Kids-Grades 6-8: A Social & Emotional Learning Curriculum*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Pages: 174 Price: \$34.95 ISBN: 978-155766931-5

Recently, increased attention has been placed on the social and emotional well-being of children. This is due, in part, to the growing rate of mental health disorders among our nation's youth. As a result, there will be an increased demand on the public school system to provide students with adequate prevention and treatment measures for stress, anxiety, and depressive disorders. *Strong Kids-Grades 6-8* is part of a four part series of learning programs designed specifically to address the social-emotional learning (SEL) of school age children. The other books in this series are: *Strong Start- Grades K-2*, *Strong Kids- Grades 3-5*, and *Strong Teens- Grades 9-12*. Merrell recognizes the need for scientifically researched curricula in schools and touts this program as being evidence-based. It has been designed, researched, and refined to promote maximum effectiveness. Merrell does not provide the research within this text, but invites the reader to investigate the book's companion Web site at <http://strongkids.uoregon.edu> to view supporting research.

The curriculum presented in this work is age-appropriate and designed to create a positive classroom environment, promote social skills, and prevent the development of future emotional problems through coping skills. The program does this through a series of twelve lessons aimed at feelings identification, dealing with anger, understanding emotions, clear and positive thinking, conflict management, letting go of stress, and goal attainment. This program can be adapted for use in most classrooms or learning environments, including use as a supplement for students with severe mental health involvements. Merrell has succeeded in creating a comprehensive and focused curriculum that is easily implemented into almost any classroom without the additional cost of special training or staff. The program is primarily self-contained.

Each lesson includes sample scripts for teachers to use to guide their class through the lesson's topics and activities. Lesson One, About Strong Kids, introduces the class to the Strong Kids curriculum by having them identify their emotions and the appropriate ways to express those feelings. The curriculum acknowledges that this lesson will not meet the needs of students with severe depression and anxiety; however, the curriculum guides students to seek help from appropriate persons be it their teacher or school counselor. This lesson has students share stories about their emotions and has the class understand the importance of listening quietly and respectfully. The learning objectives of this lesson are to respect others, come prepared, and personal stories shared in the classroom should remain in the classroom. The other lessons in this work follow the same format of guided learning objectives.

Basic classroom supplies are needed, such as an overhead projector, transparency film sheets, copy machine, chart paper, chalk and/or marker board. Each lesson is designed for a one hour class period, taught once a week over a twelve week span. The lessons are extremely comprehensive and well-organized. The book begins with a primer and brief summary of each lesson, as well as, suggestions for success in a variety of environments. Merrell recommends that teachers use dedicated folders throughout the curriculum, continually reinforce and remind students of the techniques learned throughout the program. He suggests the teacher complete at least one homework example with the entire class to help them understand the assignment. Each lesson includes: a clearly stated purpose, agenda, sample scripts, time estimations, well laid out activities, and supplemental materials. The book contains an appendix with "booster" lessons which review skills and strategies learned during primary implementation. The text also comes with a CD-ROM that contains teaching tools, handouts, assignments, and transparencies.

This text is an extremely practical tool for any Middle School educator. The author has gone to great lengths to anticipate any need, problem or question that may arise throughout this program's execution. *Strong Kids-Grades 6-8* can be carried out independently or as part of a broader SEL curriculum.

Reviewed by Shauna LaMagna, MS, Online Tutor at Smarthinking, Inc.

Middendorf, Cindy (2008). *Differentiating Instruction In Kindergarten*. New York: Scholastic.

Pages: 128 Price: \$17.95 ISBN: 0-439-87029-1

In recent years, teachers and researchers in early childhood education have explored the topic of the changing kindergarten from various angles (Goldstein, 2007; Graue, 2001; Gullo, 2006; Hatch, 2005). At stake is figuring out how teachers can address the twin demands for increased levels of student performance and the implementation of a standardized content, performance, and program expectations in a

developmentally appropriate manner that recognizes the needs of their individual students. Middendorf enters this discussion carrying the voice of a practitioner. Her goal in this text is to provide teachers with an introduction to strategies that they can use to differentiate their instruction so that their students can be addressed in a manner that helps each of them succeed.

Middendorf begins her book by stating that differentiation is a philosophy of teaching that puts children first (p. 10). In making this claim, she adds two important points. First, once teachers understand what differentiation entails, they will then realize that they've probably been putting many of these ideas into practice. Second, Middendorf recognizes that the pressure to improve student performance that teachers face from multiple audiences makes it difficult to take on any new tasks, but in this case, she believes differentiation can help students achieve this goal. While this task of teaching to each student's needs seems daunting, Middendorf, here and throughout the book, reminds the reader that no teacher can differentiate every lesson for each child.

A practitioner friendly tool that Middendorf introduces in the first chapter and uses in each additional chapter is a set of examples that she terms "A look inside a differentiated classroom." These examples cover various types of lessons (whole group, center time, etc) that occur throughout a typical kindergarten day, and in them, Middendorf provides detailed examples of what differentiation looks like in practice. Along with these "look-ins," she uses sidebars to provide tips for implementing these strategies, facts about how young children's brains develop, and quotes about teaching and children that are meant to inspire teachers.

Middendorf connects brain research, the theory of multiple intelligences, and developmentally appropriate practice to frame the need for differentiation. She address this research by explaining the importance in teaching across the modalities (vision, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic) and addressing Gardner's (1983; 1993) multiple intelligences (verbal-linguistic intelligence, bodily- kinesthetic intelligence, logical-mathematic intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, visual-spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, and naturalistic intelligence).

In Chapter 3, Middendorf makes the case that teachers must know their students as learners so that they can differentiate instruction to meet their children's needs. To do this, she shows the reader how to make a learner profile for each student that includes informal observations, notes from such things as the child's permanent record, teacher and student selected work samples, and formal assessments, such as kindergarten screeners. Middendorf also provides sample checklists for end-of-year expectations in literacy and math and a modalities of learning checklist to help teachers with this process of assessment. In getting to know students, Middendorf highlights the importance of connecting with families in this process, and she offers practical tips in establishing a line of communication with them. She ends this chapter by providing some useful examples as to how a teacher can develop children's self-assessment skills.

The final two chapters of this text get to the heart of the discussion about practices that kindergarten teachers can engage in to differentiate their instruction. Chapter 4, which Middendorf titles Setting the Stage, begins by stating that teachers must let children and families know from the beginning of the school year that their instruction will be tailored as much as possible to meet each student's needs. To get this point across, she provides a beginning of the year activity that gets families involved by asking them to fill out a questionnaire about when their child learned to walk, talk, and tie his/her shoes. Using this information, Middendorf demonstrates how a teacher can make a series of graphs to show his/her students how each one of them develops at their own pace. Middendorf also provides examples of how a teacher might use these graphs to teach his/her students different math skills.

The book also includes some helpful tips in assisting students to develop self-management skills so that a teacher can work with children either one-on-one or in small groups, and provides examples of "sponge activities" that children can engage in either when they complete their work or are waiting to work with the teacher. While lacking in detail, these activities (e.g., puzzles, exploration station, or a book nook) offer students the chance to reinforce concepts they've already learned. Middendorf gives examples of how some of these activities can be turned into center-based lessons that teach students new knowledge and skills. It includes a detailed example of a teacher engaged in differentiating literacy centers for individual students. Here, Middendorf provides a glimpse into the questions, directions, and statements that teachers can use to help tailor varying literacy activities to their students' skill levels.

In Chapter 5, Middendorf focuses on implementing skill building activities in developmental and academic areas. She begins with suggestions to build a child's fine motor and visual skills and then moves into literacy using children's names and class books. She also explores activities that use numbers to build children's math skills. Middendorf rarely uses worksheets in addressing this process of skill building. She provides useful examples of how teachers can differentiate such topics as the concept of "equal" in math through typical classroom situations. Middendorf ends her text with suggestions for managing the classroom and

providing techniques that help the child feel like a successful learner.

As a former kindergarten teacher who sat through one-too-many in-service days where the speaker directed his/her talk towards differentiating instruction for students who already knew how to read, write, and do basic math, Middendorf's book offers a breath of fresh air, and she provides useful examples that teachers can use immediately in their kindergarten classrooms.

To be clear, this book is directed towards practitioners. Middendorf assumes that her readers do not need detailed explanations about scheduling, the classroom environment, etc. I would suggest looking at Seefeldt and Wasik (2002) or Hatch's (2005) work for more detailed conversations about these issues. Finally, while I appreciate the practitioner-friendly nature of this text, I would make three suggestions to improve this work.

First, it would be helpful if Middendorf spent a moment defining developmentally appropriate practice. This term has been thrown around so much that it has become almost useless. Second, the research Middendorf cites to support her argument for differentiation is somewhat dated, and by tapping into what more recent empirical work states about how children learn (e.g., National Research Council, 2000) her argument could be strengthened significantly. Finally, her discussion on informal observation is unrefined, and I would recommend those interested in strengthening their skills in this area to look at such work as Jablon, Dombro, and Dichtelmiller's (1999) for a more detailed and theoretical discussion of methods of assessment that teachers can implement in their classrooms.

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Notari-Syverson, Angela; O'Connor, Rollanda & Vadasy, Patricia (2007). *Ladders To Literacy: A Preschool Activity Book*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Pages: 520 Price: \$49.95 ISBN: 978-1-55766-913-1

Ladders to Literacy is an excellent evidence-based, field-tested reference for any preschool teacher, daycare provider or parent. It has been field-tested in inclusive preschool settings with both large groups and small groups of children. Field testing also included children from many different cultural backgrounds. Support for development and field-testing was provided through grants from U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, and Early Education Program for Children with Disabilities.

The two theoretical perspectives upon which the book is based are Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Vygotsky's social interactionist perspective (Vygotsky, 1978).

Ladders to Literacy also uses Snow's (1983) definition of literacy which does not restrict early literacy to reading and writing but also includes other literacy events in which young children participate such as listening to stories, drawing to represent writing, helping adults with cooking recipes, and using invented spellings.

The twelve-page introduction provides an overview of the many facets of early literacy with emphasis on the theoretical and research base. It is accompanied by 7 pages of references. Some of the topics addressed in the introduction are oral language development, English language learners and intervention practices. The introduction also provides an overview of the activities included in the book as well as instructional features that accompany the activities. The multidimensional instructional approach is based upon research by a number of researchers including Sulzby & Teale's work in early literacy (1991) and work by Notari-Syverson, O'Connor and Vadasy on early literacy and language skills with young at-risk children as well as young children with disabilities (1996). The inclusion of both formal and informal assessment procedures such as portfolios, checklists and observation forms allows both parents and teachers to easily determine just which activities will be most appropriate in a given situation.

Ladders to Literacy is divided into four sections. Section one provides the theoretical framework as well as information on a literacy-rich classroom environment, early literacy development, and scaffolding as well as instructional suggestions for how to use the activities found in sections two through four. The Head Start Outcomes Framework provides teachers and parents with suggested goals. A scope and sequence chart provides suggested implementation throughout the school year. The accompanying Activity Planning Sheet allows for easy implementation of any activity into daily planning.

The three broad dimensions which categorize the activity sections in this book are: print/book awareness, metalinguistic awareness, and oral language. Sections two through four list child-responsive, developmentally appropriate activities in each of the above dimensions. Each section begins with an overview of evidence-based explanations of what sorts of activities are included in the section and how those activities might be implemented in a classroom setting, either large or small group. More detailed scope and sequence charts and Head Start Outcomes charts applying to the activities in that section also appear near the beginning of each section. The final pages of each section include assessment instruments which apply to the skills taught through the activities in that section.

Each activity in each section is fully developed, often containing four to five pages of explanations and examples. Many of the activities include materials that may be copied. The spiral-bound, 8- 1/2 x 11 format allows for easy copying of appropriate charts and materials. Activities are designed to be adaptable to a variety of learning styles, grouping practices and curricula. Each activity in *Ladders to Literacy* contains the following components:

- Purpose
- Materials
- Activity description
- Suggested adult/child interactive behaviors
- Adaptations
- A parent/home link or activity

Appendices include a Preschool Checklist which can be used to provide an overall assessment of a child's growth, more suggestions for parents, a glossary of terms and a listing of suggested children's books including some books in Braille.

Ladders to Literacy is written in terms easily understandable by teachers, day care providers or parents. This book is a "must have" for the bookshelf of any professional who works with young children. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who works with young children in any capacity. It is filled with a wealth of information, materials, and (most importantly) excellent activities to use to promote literacy skills in developmentally appropriate ways.

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Reviewed by Dr. Lynda Robinson, Associate Professor, Department of Education, School of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Cameron University. She received her Ph. D. in Child Language and Literacy Development (Education) from University of Illinois in 1990. Her fields of expertise are early childhood, reading, and children's literature. She has been instrumental in developing the graduate program in Reading at Cameron and also teaches Primary Reading in the Undergraduate Elementary Education program. Her current research interests involve multicultural children's literature and early literacy.

Pohlman, Craig (2008). *Revealing Minds: Assessing to Understand and Support Struggling Learners*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pages: 326 Price: \$29.95 ISBN: 978-0-7879-8790-9

In Revealing Minds: Assessing to Understand and Support Struggling Learners, Craig Pohlman makes a very compelling case as to why education professionals ought to rethink what they have come to understand as the purpose of assessment. Rather than using assessment as a tool to diagnose learning problems and consequently label learners (i.e., a deficit-oriented approach), Pohlman argues that assessment should be a dynamic, interactive process in which teachers, learners, parents and other professionals have an opportunity to gain an understanding of the learner as a whole in order to inform and guide instruction. Moreover, Pohlman asserts that assessors must be not only committed to identifying the learner's weaknesses, strengths/assets, and affinities (i.e., areas, topics or activities of interest for the learner), but they must be willing to draw on all these individual characteristics to create a learning and assessment plan that can be used to more effectively understand where the learner is at that moment and what the learner can accomplish if provided with the appropriate means to reach various academic goals. This book thus provides a step-by-step guide for professionals interested in implementing this innovative perspective towards assessment.

Throughout the book Pohlman emphasizes that there are at least six key, interrelated elements that come into play when using assessment to understand the learner. First, the assessor has to adopt the role of not only the person who is designing and performing the assessments, but the person who will empower the student. Students are empowered when they understand that, although they may struggle in school, they can work with assessors to create assessment tasks that are built around each learner's unique profile by employing an approach called demystification. According to Pohlman, demystification is an ongoing process, occurring in the form of a series of dialogues, in which the learner gets the opportunity to become cognizant of what and why they are struggling with certain academic tasks. This leads to agreement on how they can work together to minimize the student's struggles in school. Pohlman suggests that parents and others should also be involved in this demystification process.

Pohlman asserts that in order to understand the learner, assessors have to construct a profile which builds on each student's unique assets (strengths) and affinities (areas of interest for the student) as well as on each student's weak areas. Pohlman argues that it is through this profile that practitioners, parents and the students themselves can see and understand what ought to be done to help the student succeed in the

classroom.

Once the profile is in place, Pohlman introduces task-analysis, which is a process that enables the assessor to understand which neurodevelopmental functions are at play during a specific task, and how those constructs may be better assessed through a variety of means. Also, task-analysis helps make linkages between the academic skills that education professionals are all well versed in and the neurodevelopmental functions (e.g., memory, attention) underlying each one of these skills. According to the author, understanding these functions and linkages can enable the assessor (e.g., teacher, clinician) and others (e.g., student, parents) to understand why a learner may be struggling with a specific academic skill, and what can be done to help the learner bridge these difficulties.

Pohlman comments that assessors must be willing to draw on a phenomenological perspective towards the collection of data sources for each individual student. That is, the assessor must use both quantitative and qualitative techniques to better understand not only the *whys* someone has not mastered yet a skill, but also to inform how and what should be done next to help the child succeed. He asserts that assessment practices need to be analyzed from multiple angles and perspectives, and that doing so will result in having a more comprehensive profile for each learner.

Pohlman emphasizes that collaboration is a key aspect in understanding the learner. In the book the author provides examples of how the work by various professionals, and what can be learned from parents and the students themselves, can enlighten and inform the assessment process. Finally, once data have been collected for each student, assessors ought to understand how to find and analyze recurring themes from the data sources collected. These themes will later enable the assessor to write a detailed yet comprehensible report that can be used to share findings with not only parents and other professionals but also with the student. Numerous examples of how to analyze and report the data are provided in the book.

Overall, I think this is an informative, insightful and well-crafted book. The author's clear writing style makes it easy for everyone (even those who may not be familiar with the fields of education and psychology) to understand the contents of the book. Research support appears in the appendices for further reference. The case studies are very helpful for understanding key concepts and how assessment tasks may be used to assess all learners. In all, I believe this is a good resource for education professionals and researchers alike. The book can definitely be used to help professionals working in classrooms understand the importance of assessment, how assessment can be carried out in the best interest of all students, not only struggling learners, and how these professionals have a crucial role in helping all learners succeed through an assessment approach that is built for each unique learner. The book also provides a very good example of how theory/research informs practice. I believe this is a book that more than one will want to revisit and keep close.

Reviewed by Carla Amaro-Jimenez, Doctoral Candidate in the Literacy/Teaching English as a Second Language Program at the University of Cincinnati.

Rief, Sandra F. & Heimburge, Julie A. (2007). *How to Reach and Teach All Children Through Balanced Literacy: User-Friendly Strategies, Tools, Activities, and Ready-to-Use Materials. Grades 3-8.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.

Pages: 352 Price: \$29.95 ISBN: 978-0-7879-8805-0

Sandra Rief and Julie Heimburge's book, *How to Reach and Teach All Children Through Balanced Literacy*, offers a wide variety of engaging tools, tips and strategies that are readily usable for the practicing teacher. The rationale given for taking a balanced approach to literacy rests on the belief that using the best methods from both a skills-based and literature-based holistic approach is most effective in reaching all students in the upper elementary and middle level literacy classroom, grades 3-8. Using a metaphor of literacy as an umbrella, the components of literacy instruction (reading, writing, speaking and listening) are presented as inextricably connected, requiring students to experience both modes in their quest to make meaning from text.

The book is broken down into fourteen chapters, guiding the literacy practitioner through a veritable maze and serving as a how-to guide to taking a balanced literacy approach in the elementary and middle school classroom. Sprinkled throughout are ready-to-use reproducible student hand-outs, representing the authors' approach to strategic literacy instruction. Beginning with a brief six page rationale for reaching all learners through a "balanced approach," the first two thirds of the book provides ideas for structuring classroom settings, using reading and writing workshop, word study, oral language, thematic approaches to literacy

instruction, author studies, literature circles and book clubs. Chapter eleven explores methods for helping students with reading and writing difficulties, using reading and writing strategies to scaffold and accommodate instruction for the dependent reader. Lastly, the use of enhancing literacy through technology introduces the reader to software programs that support literacy as tools to aid instruction.

A variety of factors influence decisions about best practices in literacy instruction, including teachers' understanding of the discipline, their insights into and philosophy surrounding learning, and the growing need to meet local, state, and national standards. In an era in which school administrators worry about low achievement scores and under-prepared teachers in the field of reading, this book presents a wealth of methods to scaffold reading instruction. Well prepared, capable literacy practitioners who already have a rich theoretical understanding of literacy and learning will be able to take the strategies offered in this book to support a socially interactive and constructive model of reading. For the novice practitioner, what is missing is a critical discussion of ways to sustain a literacy environment conducive to reading and understanding challenging texts.

As a comprehensive reference guide, the strategies, tools, activities and ready-to-use materials presented in this book will be of help to the literacy practitioner. Notably absent, and of particular concern as research on effective literacy instruction points out, is that teachers should be utilizing reading strategies not only for accomplishing literacy tasks, but for also for teaching students about the metacognitive process of reading, modeling explicitly when and how to use strategies (Langer, 2000; Greenleaf et al., 2001). As its title suggests, the book's methods strive to reach ALL children. This far-reaching claim serves up instruction as an elixir for poor readers. Unaccounted for are the complexities inherent in the notion of literacy, necessarily including social and cultural contexts that are situated and relational. Set out to offer such a wide scope of techniques, the book necessarily and admittedly by the authors is intended to be a reference source; as such it presents a myriad of reading instruction methods for the already capable, well-prepared teacher to support competent, and confident, readers.

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Stepanek, Jennifer; Appel, Gary; Leong, Melinda; Turner Mangan, Michelle & Mitchell, Mark (2007). *Leading Lesson Study: A Practical Guide for Teachers and Facilitators*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

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Since the late 1990's, increasing numbers of educators in the United States have heard about and shown interest in lesson study, a practice-based, inquiry approach to professional development. In lesson study (LS), 4-6 teachers collaboratively design a lesson plan, teach and observe the lesson to collect data on student learning, use their observations to refine the lesson plan, and reflect upon the implications of their work for their future teaching. LS has been credited with having a transformative impact on teaching and learning in Japan (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999), where it originated, and it aligns with many American scholars' definitions of high-quality professional development (e.g., Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Nonetheless, in spite of increased awareness of LS in the United States, it generally remains a "boutique" reform, practiced in a limited number of areas and inaccessible to the vast majority of teachers. Stepanek, Appel, Leong, Turner Mangan, and Mitchell's new book, *Leading Lesson Study: A Practical Guide for Teachers and Facilitators*, has the potential, however, to help a greater number of American teachers to become involved with LS.

Stepanek and colleagues set out to provide the tools and advice necessary for educators to translate interest in lesson study (LS) into concrete action. Chapter One opens with a brief description of the LS process, and then moves into an explanation of the habits of mind it develops and big ideas it addresses. Next, there

follows a succinct, research-based rationale for LS, and finally a convenient, one-page summary introduction to LS. For the individual with some basic knowledge of LS, this chapter is unlikely to cover much new ground, but it does live up to its title by "Making a case for lesson study." It could be a valuable resource for anyone trying to provide basic information to colleagues about LS, or secure administrative support.

Chapter Two offers a comprehensive list of things leaders should keep in mind as they lay the groundwork for LS. For example, the authors suggest four "necessary ingredients" that should ideally be in place - willing and engaged teachers, time for collaboration, administrator support, and an action plan - and five additional supports that can be key to LS's success: high-quality curriculum, collegial relationships, collaborative school climate, outside support, and school wide participation (p. 18-19). Although all of the above influence the work of an LS group, and should thus be considered by leaders, this chapter could be intimidating for some readers. It is suggested, for example, that, "it may take an extended period of time to bring together the people and resources to support lesson study" (p. 32). The authors do, however, also suggest that, "starting out small with a group of enthusiastic teachers will help lesson study to grow and gain momentum" (p. 32). The work of such a trailblazing group might then serve to spark curiosity among more people and attract resources to LS.

For the LS leader who does succeed in getting a group of teachers onboard for the process, the meat of this book is in Chapters Three through Seven, which walk through how to facilitate the different stages of the process. These chapters have a consistent structure, starting with a general description of what should happen during a particular LS phase, and then providing worksheets or guidelines that leaders can use to help structure their group's work. Each chapter includes sample materials, and "From the field" sidebars that describe related work from actual lesson study groups. They then include Challenges, Reflecting and Assessing Progress, Moving On to the Next Phase, and Key Ideas sections before concluding with From our Team to Yours, which provides advice from classroom teachers active in LS work. Because users of this book are likely to read and reread it in bits and pieces as they prepare for and proceed through the LS process, such a regular structure is a helpful feature.

After this meticulous progression through the LS process, the book steps back and concludes with a short chapter aimed at helping LS leaders to grow and sustain LS beyond a single successful cycle. Rather than suggesting how to rapidly scale up lesson study, the authors focus instead on "gradual growth" and how to improve the "depth and integrity" of LS work (p. 155).

Leading Lesson Study fulfills its subtitle's promise to be a "practical guide," with numerous samples, examples, and worksheets. In total, the book's 161 pages include sixty-three forms or figures, not to mention its three appendices, one of which includes three sample research lessons plans. The authors thankfully do not take practicality to the extreme of setting out an overly rigid LS recipe. One of the causes of LS's success in Japan has been its flexibility and the fact that teachers and leaders have modified it to respond to different contexts and purposes, and Stepanek and colleagues have accordingly avoided being too prescriptive in their approach. They do, however, provide an accessible wealth of information that will support lesson study leaders, and be useful to a variety of different readers. For educators who have some familiarity with LS, but may be uncomfortable leading a group of teachers, *Leading Lesson Study's* resources and practice-based advice could effectively scaffold their work. For those who may feel comfortable leading, but lack familiarity with LS, the book provides a solid foundation in LS's technical elements and ethos. For a new lesson study group that does not have a single leader, *Leading Lesson Study* could also serve as a resource to the entire team, allowing for shared leadership and responsibility. In sum, Stepanek and colleagues have succeeded in creating a guide with rich potential to increase both the quantity and quality of lesson study work done in the United States.

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