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Brief reviews for September 2007

Andrews, Hans A. (2006). *Awards and Recognition for Exceptional Teachers: K-12 and Community College Programs in the U.S.A., Canada and Other Countries*. Ottawa: Matilda Press.

Pages: 400 Price: \$24.95, \$29.00 CDN ISBN: 978-0-9787158-0-9

Hans Andrews' book, *Awards and Recognition for Exceptional Teachers: K-12 and Community College Programs in the U.S.A., Canada and Other Countries* does an outstanding job of elucidating various dimensions of teacher recognition programs in American schools and community colleges. The book portrays the evaluation of teacher recognition over the past twenty years; gives a comprehensive overview of the current programs; and provides the rationale and criteria for teacher recognition programs that foster excellence across all educational institutions. Furthermore, Andrews provides us with a veritable compendium of practical tips, many pragmatic suggestions, questions, critiques, and readings for teachers and administrators to establish successful teaching recognition programs.

The book is divided into two thematic sections that progress in a logical and seamless fashion. Part I assesses and summarizes the current teacher awards and recognition policies in the U.S. and other countries such as Canada and Australia. In this section, Andrews laments the scarcity of teacher recognition programs, providing the astonishing statistic that half of all institutions do not bestow teaching awards in any given academic year. He argues that improving the quality of education requires paying more attention to ways of recognizing and rewarding good teaching. Throughout the text, Andrews shifts between macro and micro perspectives to weave together a convincing portrait for why and how institutions establish faculty recognition programs.

According to Andrews, educational institutions should institute teaching award and recognition programs to show their acknowledgement and support for teaching; to honor and reward the accomplishments of excellent teachers both internally, to the campus community, and externally, to stakeholders; to create a core of outstanding faculty who can inspire and enable other faculty; to slow the exodus of teachers who are leaving the field; and to serve as a means to encourage better teaching practices by motivating other teachers to achieve similar levels of performance. In this section, Andrews does an excellent job in demonstrating how teacher rewards and recognition play an important role in academic "psychiatry" —impacting teachers' satisfaction with their work and its quality.

Andrews argues that teaching is perceived as a marginalized activity in most institutions and teachers often feel unappreciated. They, therefore, need to receive personal rewards, institutional support and professional recognition to remain positive about what they do. Thus, Andrews urges governing boards, administrators, and teacher organizations to work together in developing effective teacher recognition programs which align with the goals and values of each educational institution and its members. To accomplish this particular aim, Andrew emphasizes the need for engaging in conversations about why the teacher award and recognition programs are important and what their implications are for teachers, students, and institutions.

The author also provides suggestions for administrators regarding the establishment of an effective awards and recognition program by highlighting the key elements of successful programs as well as discussing the potential pitfalls to avoid. These include lack of established criteria and formalized selection procedures made explicit and public. According to Andrews, in order to facilitate improved teaching the program should be future oriented, perceived as highly valuable, somewhat difficult to attain, yet realistically available. Andrews

also provides a list of possible criteria and outcomes that can be used to determine how successful an existing teaching award and recognition program is. These outcomes include promotion of positive attitudes among teachers and students; stimulation of teacher's confidence in teaching; and inspiration to work even harder.

Part II explores current award and recognition programs by giving various program descriptions, philosophies, and award selection criteria in American schools and community colleges as well as a brief inclusion of a limited number of similar programs abroad. Andrews successfully demonstrates the high variability among policies, procedures, award types and numbers, and criteria used among award bestowing institutions. While he explores some awards and recognition programs in more detail including the history of the award and its effect on award recipients, others are presented with only a brief reference to their rationale and award selection criteria. Throughout the chapter, Andrew does not provide any background for his decision of providing detailed descriptions of a collection of award programs while providing just a cursory inclusion of others. In this section, Andrews does not move beyond providing basic information about the various teacher award and recognition programs. In other words, he fails to offer a comprehensive analysis of selected programs. There is a need for untangling the issues associated with selected programs including their match with institutional mission and values, a consideration for a wide-range of instructional values and objectives in award selection process, and how both collaborative and individual teaching achievements are rewarded. Andrews basically needs to provide a more in-depth analysis of selected programs via comparisons and contrasts of their values, objectives, selection processes and criteria, and their subsequent impact on award recipients.

Drawing from a diverse background in teaching and administration, Andrews looks at the teacher award and recognition programs dilemma from a variety of different perspectives. Despite the lack of analysis of selected programs in Part II, Andrews' delightful book is a practical and useful guide for anyone interested in improving the learning and morale climate in schools. It is written for teachers, policy makers, and administrators who are interested in establishing a new teacher recognition and award program or trying to improve an existing one. As we continue forward in the search for improved quality in our nation's schools, *Awards and Recognition for Exceptional Teachers* can serve as an invaluable road map for the journey of establishing successful teacher recognition programs.

Reviewed by Serkan Hekimoglu, Instructor, Mathematics and Computer Science, Gainesville State College

Benson, Peter L. (2006) *All Kids Are Our Kids: What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents*. Second edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pages: 429 Price: \$19.95 ISBN: 0-7879-8518-X

Peter Benson has compiled a comprehensive update of this book (first edition published a decade ago and now out of print), adding a wealth of current research evidence of the validity of his Developmental Assets instruments. The multitude of youth workers who have been interested in this approach will find new evidence of the value of the Developmental Assets for understanding how youth mature into adults in our complex society.

The phrase "It takes a whole village to raise a child," presumed to have originated in Africa, has generated considerable debate as to its true origin. Benson avoids this controversy by kicking off the book with a documented reference to a "traditional greeting of the Masai people of Kenya and Tanzania. Instead of greeting with 'How are you?' they greet with 'How are the children?' The traditional response is ... 'All the children are well.'" (p. 3). Both of these concepts relate well to Benson's passion for communities taking responsibility for raising responsible children and adolescents, and he has built his career on promoting his contribution to this vision.

This second edition of Benson's book consists of two major parts: (1) Bringing Out the Best in All Kids and (2) What We All Can Do. An extensive bibliography provides a compendium of research and practical resources that back up his thesis.

At the heart of Benson's work is his 156-item self-reporting instrument called the *Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors*. These attitudes and behaviors are classified into Developmental Assets and Risk Factors. Developmental Assets are those factors that support responsibility in the life of children and adolescents, whereas Risk Factors tend toward the opposite result. Benson reports that the

instrument has been used since 1990 in more than 2,500 school districts in the United States, in urban, suburban and rural communities.

There is no doubt that the breakdown of the traditional family has contributed to an increase in antisocial behaviors by youth, particularly in the urban settings but also in traditional bastions of middle and upper class values. If communities are to protect themselves from the destructive behaviors of their youth (and eventually from irresponsible adults), they need to find ways to increase the Developmental Assets and reduce Risk Factors of their children and adolescents.

Benson's revised book provides detailed instructions for implementing such an effort on the part of a community, including the research behind the approach. Not unlike the proverbial effort required for Sisyphus to roll a huge rock up a steep hill, sustaining such an initiative requires constant work and vigilance. Benson presents evidence that it works, but only time will tell if many of those who embark on the journey will be able to sustain the level of effort required to perpetuate it.

Reviewed by William L. Brown, Coordinator of Test Development for the Michigan Educational Assessment Program. He is responsible for developing K-12 assessments in the four basic content areas as required by the No Child Left Behind Act, and for monitoring indicators of student success for the Power of We Consortium in the Lansing Tri-County Area. He received his doctorate from Michigan State University in 2003. Email: BrownB6@Michigan.gov

Cutter, Joseph (2007) *Independent Movement and Travel in Blind Children: A Promotion Model*. Greenwich, Connecticut: 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.

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

Pages: 206 Price: \$24.95 ISBN: 978-0-7879-9443-3

In a world of standardized testing and NCLB (No Child Left Behind), many mathematics teachers are constantly looking for new ways to motivate middle school students to learn. Because I have been a middle school math teacher for twenty-one years, I am always trying to find new ways to help students have fun in math class, but, at the same time, learn the necessary skills they need for the future. Dan Flockhart's book, *Fantasy Baseball and Mathematics*, is a possible selection that teachers could use to help students enjoy learning math and become proficient in real-life mathematics. This book includes rules for playing Fantasy Baseball, student handouts with detail explanations about the rules and skills needed to play the game, graphing activities, forty-six practice worksheets and quizzes, pretest/posttest, answer keys and an appendix with lesson plans.

The *Fantasy Baseball and Mathematics* game is played by students picking select baseball players to make up their team. Students have a salary cap of \$40 million to spend on player values. Points are earned on the players' hits, walks, stolen bases, home runs, runs scored, and runs batted in. The team with the most points wins the game. Depending on the level of the students, the teacher can choose from more than one-hundred and sixty different formulas to figure out the total points for any one game. The different formulas include the use of integers, fractions, decimals, positive and negative exponents, roots, factorials and summations. Students use newspapers and/or computers to obtain the statistics they need for the game. Students advance to constructing circle, stack-bar, or multiple-line graphs.

As I reviewed the book, I wanted to think about how the program would work in my classroom and with our school curriculum. I was pleased to see that the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Standards were addressed in all of the activities. The topics included are numbers and operations, algebra, measurement, data analysis and probability, problem-solving, reasoning and proof, communication, connections, and representation.

This program provides an excellent experience for middle school students because it gives them the chance to be responsible for their own work. They can trade their papers and verify the other students' computations. Also, students can play the *Fantasy Baseball and Mathematics* game in groups. Students discuss and analyze mathematics, and communicate their mathematical thinking to others which supports the NCTM Communication Standard.

Many curricula are very demanding and some teachers may find it hard to add supplemental materials. However, using the book as a supplemental resource, teachers will find the practice worksheets are clearly written in a user-friendly layout. I believe teachers and students will feel very comfortable completing the exercises. For example, practice worksheet #15 is called "Converting Fractions, Decimals, and Percentages." The student is expected to find the cumulative points using one given formula for each player and make conversions. Two charts with specific headings, along with one player's statistics filled in as an example, make it easy for students to know what is expected. The students are using real-life data, learning to work with fractions, decimals, and percentages, and reviewing the NCTM Number and Operations Standard for Grades 6-8.

Another plus to using this curriculum is the abundance of quizzes. Whenever I plan to assess the students and decide to make up new quizzes, I think, "I do not want to reinvent the wheel." Flockhart helps the teacher save time by providing quizzes that directly match the skills previously learned. A pretest/posttest is provided, and I believe it is helpful for the teacher to assess students before and after to see the change

students have made using the program.

For the new or experienced teacher, Flockhart has a great website at www.fantasysportsmath.com that provides information about the program, videos, testimonials, statistics, and support. After viewing the website, I felt more comfortable with the program because of the section of "Frequently Asked Questions." I wondered how girls would react to this program, and Flockhart admitted that at first, many girls are shy. But later on, when the girls start beating the boys, they feel very comfortable and have fun with the game.

Probably the only negative I found about the program was that in order to start the game, the teacher needs the list of the updated values of the players. Purchasing one book allows the owner to access the information on the website one time for free. After that a nominal fee is charged for future years. I checked out the nominal fee and it was \$3.95 which was reasonable.

If you are looking for ways to excite your students in the middle school mathematics class, this is definitely a book you should buy. Also, Flockhart has written *Fantasy Basketball and Mathematics*, *Fantasy Football and Mathematics*, and *Fantasy Soccer and Mathematics*. Looks like Flockhart has covered all "bases." It's quite possible that students will have the opportunity to learn mathematics in a fun way and increase their scores on standardized tests. Sounds like a win-win situation.

Reviewed by Carol A. Rodano (Ed.D.), Adjunct Professor of Mathematics Education at Rowan University, Glassboro, N.J.; Math teacher for twenty-one years at Bunker Hill Middle School, Sewell, N.J.

Jenkins, Carol Brennan & White, Deborah J. D., Editors (2007). *Nonfiction Author Studies in the Elementary Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pages: 152 Price: \$19.00 ISBN: 978-0-325-00855-4

In structuring the elementary curricula around a nonfiction author study, this book, edited by Carol Brennan Jenkins and Deborah J. D. White, examines how to use nonfiction literature in the elementary classroom as more than just an exercise in reading or a tool to find and identify vocabulary. It offers the idea that reading means so much more. The authors of each chapter consider the value and importance of the writing involved in the literature that students read and they consider how to have the students develop a sense of the writing; not just as a means of learning the skills but in the way that an author might develop a story. This book is intended to provide exemplar curricula that serve to help teachers find a way to engage students in seeing the writer and therefore being able to see themselves as writers.

The editors subscribe to the idea that learning about the writers in as much depth as the writing itself heightens the learning experiences in a variety of ways. They promote their views as a means of integrating subjects, topics, learning events, and learning styles, in order that students might experience authentic learning. They describe the value of author studies and how to identify quality nonfiction authors for an author study. This is helpful for readers who might be inspired to implement non-fiction author studies in their own classrooms. The editors claim that there is value in students finding an interest in reading nonfiction writings. They believe that developing this interest lies at the root of developing the same sense of intellectual and emotional exploration that students might find in fiction.

The following chapters are supportive of the ability to use nonfiction to excite the intellect and the emotion of the students as they engage in their reading explorations. Each chapter is a window into a teacher's classroom. The authors of each chapter clearly describe their classroom environment and explain why they have chosen a particular author to study. Many of these teachers describe their classrooms as teaching to ELL, special needs and the commonly found heterogeneous or mixed groups of student learning. They each provide clear explanations of how they implemented the lessons, how students reacted to the lessons, and how they expanded on the students' learning. Each chapter also provides student samples used for assessment and describes the multiplicity of responses throughout the nonfiction author study.

The first author study dissects Gail Gibbons' writings, integrating science into the reading by having first grade students engage in events that their stories were written about (growing apple trees through seasons). Students were guided to take action on what they thought was an important message learned through their reading, doing so by writing letters to administrators about their ideas and concerns. This is a great example of civic opportunity, of scientific thinking for application and of considering reading and writing as a form of communication rather than solely an exercise in a classroom. This chapter also demonstrates how to integrate technology and performing arts into assessment tools, recognizing that students have a variety of ways to demonstrate their learning.

The second author study dissects the nonfiction writings of Ann Morris. Because this class was mostly composed of ELL students, the nonfiction author study was chosen to be easily related to students' experiences, integrating history and social studies within the curriculum. Students shared their personal experiences and family histories as they read about people from other countries in the stories. The authors of this chapter did an excellent job of providing explanations of how teachers can work to improve student writing. They also provided good examples of learning activities to promote oral and written communication skills using cultural every day tasks such as cooking rice, creating a family tree and describing a picture of an event students shared with the class. The authors complete their "window view" by providing evidence of improved student writing skills with student samples.

Chapter four is focused on the nonfiction works of Jim Arnosky. The author of this chapter begins with a scientific connection of discovery. As the students continue to learn about the author and his writing, they look for patterns in his books, evidence for the patterns and they attempt to evaluate what the reasons are for those patterns. This author study was chosen to intrigue students to read through the sense of discovery. The approach that the author of this chapter uses suggests that she supports inquiry as a means of intrigue. As an elementary methods science teacher, I found this chapter the most stimulating. Teachers often find it very difficult to implement science in their curriculum even though standards require science in the classroom. Science is therefore often taught very superficially and as a disconnected learning event from the rest of the curriculum. Literacy is commonly integrated with social studies and history with the intent of hooking a student's interest by making personal connections via experiences. I found it remarkable that this chapter so easily demonstrated how to integrate scientific thinking into learning through literacy. The author of this chapter provided explanations as she consistently used scientific terminology with the students such as "looking for evidence," "making predictions" and "fact versus fiction." I also applaud the author of this chapter as she commented on improvements and future suggestions showing the use and value of teacher metacognition.

The fifth chapter integrates literacy with the social aspects of historical figures and events as it explores the nonfiction works of Jean Fritz. Students learn about the author and the characters written about on a more intimate or personal level and the students then compare their feelings and experiences with what they think the characters and author felt and experienced. The teachers in this classroom reinforce civic and social skills by promoting caring and empathy about others as students learn about history and about literacy. The premise of their approach seems to be that passion in writing leads to passion about reading and that can lead to passion about life.

The last chapter examines the nonfiction works of Sandra Markle to develop critical thinking. They do this by expecting students to develop reading guides and act as experts for a book they have chosen. The authors of this chapter also provide suggestions for improvement in teaching, applying metacognition to personal practice. One aspect that I found valuable was their discussion about how they might improve their lessons by addressing the students' learning. They suggested ideas such as self-evaluation and peer evaluation, which are means of implementing metacognition for student learning. This is consistent with their premise of the value of critical thinking in learning.

Overall, this is an excellent book on how the use of nonfiction author study in the elementary classroom proves to allow students to delve deep into reading and content comprehension and leads towards life-long interest in literacy and learning. The chapters are great examples of how the teacher can integrate cohesively other topics and subjects rather than using a random piecemeal of readings solely to improve vocabulary, reading and writing. They are short "how to's" that could easily be applied to a classroom. Each of these chapters is intriguing and informative. I enjoyed the clear and concise manner in which the chapters demonstrated how the literature lessons were presented to students, the reasoning for the particular author study and the reasoning for the given approaches. The authors for each chapter focused on integrating subjects such as science, history, social studies and civics, engaging students in metacognition and applying teacher metacognition to their discussions. They also used a variety of assessments to promote a multiplicity of student responses, such as classroom discussions, performances, technology activities, written assignments, letters to officials and creating visuals such as venn diagrams and concept maps. I would highly suggest that all seasoned elementary teachers read this book. I will be providing it as a resource requirement for my pre-service elementary teachers. I think that my graduate assessment classes might also find this book valuable in considering how to implement a supportive array of assessments.

Reviewed by Sharon Schleigh, EDD doctoral student at ASU and graduate teaching assistant in the Curriculum & Instruction Division of Education.

Krovetz, Martin L. & Arriaza, Gilberto (2006). *Collaborative Teacher Leadership: How*

Teachers Can Foster Equitable Schools. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Pages: 194 Price: \$29.95 ISBN: 1-4129-0502-8

Collaborative Teacher Leadership is a collection of reflective narratives that describe the accomplishments and challenges of teachers enrolled in a Master's degree program in Collaborative Leadership at San Jose State University. Much of the book is in the words of these 60 plus teacher leaders who demonstrate the development of both their teaching pedagogy and their ability to be dynamic leaders and advocates in their schools. As part of their teams' action research projects these teachers detail their meetings with school administrators, attempts to encourage staff support and enthusiasm for change, efforts to reconstruct ineffective teaching practices, reevaluations of long adopted curriculums, and insistence on a culture of dialogue in their schools.

While the focus of the book is on educational leadership, authors Krovetz and Arriaza make a point of emphasizing leadership not in the "principal-as-hero model" (p. xiii) but in the fashion of "distributed leadership" based on involving skillful teacher leaders in long-term efforts focused on student achievement. The narratives reflect this concept as teachers write on how the quality of life and learning improve when schools build leadership capacity.

Self-proclaimed fans of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's (1998) *Understanding By Design* process, authors Krovetz and Arriaza begin each chapter with a list of Enduring Understandings which are meant to be clear statements about the focus for that chapter, and end each chapter with Essential Questions that help the reader reflect on its main points. Reflective Questions along the way guide the reader in personalizing the narratives to their own school situation and provide an opportunity for thinking in terms of reflection and praxis. Resources listed throughout the book are an additional benefit for those wishing to know more about the strategies or programs discussed in the narratives.

I highly recommend this scholarly yet passionate book to any pre-service or in-service teacher, school administrator, or teacher educator. With Krovetz and Arriaza acting as guides, the stories of the narrating teacher leaders will encourage and inspire educators to take on more challenging roles of leadership in their schools in an attempt to encourage increased equity and collaboration by changing a school's culture, one's own role, and one's relationship within the school community. As the authors state, "The habits of the mind that the teacher leaders write about ð use of data, focus on equity, job-embedded professional development, leading and managing change, courageous followership, advocacy, and so forth ð can be at the heart of the work of school leaders in any school" (p. xii).

References

Wiggin, G. & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Reviewed by Kylene Kilgore, a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Portland State University and elementary public school teacher.

Leedy, Paul D. & Ormrod, Jeanne Ellis (2005). *Practical Research: Planning and Design*. Eighth edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill/Prentice Hall.

Pages: 325 Price: \$63.67 ISBN: 9780131108950

Research evidence seems, increasingly, to underpin all aspects of our daily lives. The words "research has shown..." are used to justify and promote everything from government policy to choice of shampoo. We hear the phrase so often we rarely consider its meaning. At the very start of this book Leedy and Ormrod encourage readers to think about what research is and, more importantly, what it isn't. They remind us that real, useful research is not re-presenting the work of others or reading everything you can find about a given subject. We should be wary of how the word has been claimed by the worlds of advertising and marketing as an attention grabber that gives some form of kudos to a product. This reminder effectively prompts us to critically consider the research process, to question its benefits and examine its challenges. *Practical Research* provides a useful framework to help us achieve this.

The reflexive approach is apparent throughout the text, the reader is presented with checklists and points to consider which ensure that they are constantly questioning the validity and worth of the research they are undertaking. The fact that this issue is woven throughout the text rather than presented and examined in a discrete chapter or section consolidates the idea that the decisions made by the researcher at every stage of

a study have an impact on the final work. Good research methodically acknowledges and deals with the issues such choices present, it does not seek to hide or gloss over difficulties. However, the relatively conversational tone to the writing and the use of rhetorical questions and examples of work ensures that the book is not weighed down by this theme. The reader does not feel as though they are being lectured to.

The chapter content begins with fundamentals, such as identifying a research area, writing a proposal, reviewing relevant literature and so on. Each step of the research process is clearly identified, its role examined and useful examples are included to illustrate key points and issues. The chapters are sub-divided into smaller sections covering specific areas, a feature that enables the book to be used as a reference guide by more experienced researchers who need to refresh their minds about specific information. The concepts covered within these initial chapters are well defined and coherently developed, demonstrating the authors' clear depth of understanding and authority in the field—giving the reader confidence in the information they present. Some readers may feel that certain sections are too obvious and simplistic for research students, such as how to best utilise library resources or how to use the internet effectively. Whilst this can be acknowledged as sound criticism we must also be mindful that the ability and opportunity to undertake research should not be limited to academics. Too often research has focussed on the issues that researchers think are important, the views of those actually affected are rarely the catalyst for a study. Increasingly we hear calls for practitioner based research, and this book would enable anyone with an interest to undertake a project in an organised and effective way.

The subsequent chapters explore the nature of data collection and data analysis in greater depth and detail, dividing them into qualitative and quantitative approaches. Within these chapters the primary methods are outlined and discussed and readers are encouraged to ask themselves questions about their research to try to guide them into the most appropriate choice of method. Again, the style used is relatively informal and conversational, often the information is presented under key points which mean that the reader is not bombarded with long paragraphs of complex terminology. This is particularly useful when introducing and explaining aspects of quantitative methods. Within the section on quantitative methods the use of graphs, tables and other examples allows the reader to gain a more practical understanding of the different approaches which is valuable, especially to those new to research. The book also makes it clear that the two approaches need not be exclusive, a study can incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods effectively.

The final chapter provides information about preparing and presenting the research report, continuing the user friendly style mentioned previously. This is the eighth edition of the text and helpfully the new, expanded and revised topics are listed in the introduction. The book is also supported by online resources for students and academics, including self assessments, projects and checklists. Throughout the book a number of technology features are also highlighted, such as sorting and organising data and using spreadsheets. This range of support means that both experienced and novice researchers can utilise the book; novices are able to develop their skills by accessing the additional materials and those with more confidence in their skills can use the text directly.

The scope of this book is huge, it touches upon everything from how to write effectively to when to use a parametric t-test, but despite this breadth of information it is an effective manual for those interested in research. It does not focus on one specific study area nor does it presume an existing level of knowledge or expertise and this is its strength. Readers can apply the checklists and assessment questions to their study, whether they are undertaking a small scale, personal project or a doctoral thesis. The simplicity of the text and the clarity with which concepts are presented allows new researchers to accomplish a sound piece of work and encourages more experienced researchers to reflect upon their selection of approach and reconsider their warrant for study, which can only be a positive thing.

Reviewed by Jane Williams, Senior Lecturer, Early Years, University of Wales, Newport.

Oczkus, Lori D. (2007). *Guided Writing: Practical Lessons, Powerful Results*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pages: 168 Price: \$21.00 ISBN: 978-0-325-01071-7

Oczkus presents elementary childhood teachers a how-to guide for facilitating elementary school students' writing, in her book, *Guided Writing: Practical Lessons, Powerful Results*. The author describes guided writing as "a bridge between shared writing and independent writing"(p.3). Intended as a "flippy book" (p. xii) or reference text for teachers, the author provides lesson plans which incorporate exercises and activities to stimulate students' imaginations and translate those imaginations into active writing behaviors.

Guided writing takes place through a process based on Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development ("distance between the actual developmental level of a child and level of potential development under adult guidance..."), and Fielding and Pearson's (1991) "gradual release model of instruction" (scaffolding of students' skill levels during lessons) in which children's writing is teacher supported in a step by step fashion. Teachers model skill development by thinking aloud about writing, helping children brainstorm examples of good writing through literature, and providing guidance to children during practice writing lessons. The "modeling, guidance, practice" process occurs for individual writing skills (i.e. teaching to write a paragraph), and continues as more advanced writing skills are introduced, while supporting individual students' developmental writing level.

The author presents sample lessons for whole classes, small groups or individual writing activities/exercises. She gives illustrations of graphic organizers (outline illustrations) for writing, and actual examples of children's work. Oczkus provides guided writing models (in penciled bulleted form) chapter by chapter to use as clearly outlined lesson plans. Teachers can benefit from these easy to follow suggested lesson plans and techniques, utilizing rubric assessments, exercise/outlines, (tear-out) handouts, and writing graphic organizers. The lessons provide practical application for guided writing that teachers can adapt to their classrooms for entire class lessons, workshops, working individually with children, or cooperative learning groups. Oczkus offers application of guided writing principles across different writing genres such as poetry, personal narratives, report writing, fiction, nonfiction, essays, story plays, and character writing.

Overall, the text provides teachers a *guided* approach to planning and implementing writing lessons, assignments, and assessments which are developmentally appropriate for elementary students and dovetailed to individual children's needs.

The author achieved the primary goal of this text which is to help teachers provide a foundation for good writing skills that their students can build upon as they develop into becoming independent young writers. Oczkus' text offers potential for creating developmentally appropriate guiding writing lesson plans and techniques for other age groups of children, adolescents, and adults.

References

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Reviewed by Nancy S. Longo, PhD, MEd (Education), MSW, Educational Psychology Instructor & Mentor

Roberts, Julia L. & Inman Tracy F. (2007). *Strategies for Differentiating Instruction: Best Practices for the Classroom*. Waco, TX : Prufrock Press.

Pages: 221 Price: \$29.95 ISBN: 9781593632052

Teachers in classrooms across the country have seen an ever-tightening tension between externally driven demands for improved student achievement levels and trying to meet the individual learning needs of students in their classrooms. As a result, teachers must navigate a learning path for students that takes into account state content knowledge standards, the corresponding assessments of that knowledge, and full inclusion policies that expand the range of students' academic needs. At the same time, funding streams for professional development have remained static at best. These teaching, learning, and accountability demands create a market environment ripe for "how-to" books designed to fill in teachers' professional learning gaps.

Strategies for Differentiating Instruction: Best Practices for the Classroom is a text that responds to this market niche. The book helps "teachers use strategies that allow all students to learn on an ongoing basis; in other words, it is about strategies that remove the learning ceiling and allow each student to make continuous progress" (p. 3). Julia Link Roberts is the Mahurin Professor in Gifted Studies and director of The Center for Gifted Studies at Western Kentucky University. She received her Ed.D. at Oklahoma State University. Tracy Ford Inman is a former teacher and now serves as associate director for The Center for Gifted Studies at Western Kentucky University. Ms. Inman earned her master's degree in education at Western Kentucky University. Both authors bring a wealth of knowledge to the area of gifted education and share their expertise

in this text.¹

The text begins with an introductory metaphor that relates the preparation of a one-dish meal for a variety of dinner guests to the presentation of one lesson for a range of learners:

Imagine a one-dish dinner, the cook's favorite, lovingly prepared with the freshest ingredients... [with] every part of the dish prepared according to the recipe.... At last, with everyone seated, the cook dances out of the kitchen with the dish in hand – ready to satisfy the appetites of all!
(p.1)

In Chapter One "One-Size-Fits-All? You've Got to Be Kidding" – the authors use this metaphor to point out the learning issues associated with the "one-lesson-fits-all" model found in many traditional classrooms. With this as context, the authors briefly examine why teachers need to change their instruction, then offer the book as "a roadmap to differentiation" (p. 8). The authors use three essential questions to orient readers to new instructional offerings: What do I want students to know, understand, and be able to do? Who already knows, understands, and/or can use the content or demonstrate the skill? And what can I do for him, her, or them, so they can make continuous progress and extend their learning?

Chapter Two, "Climate: Creating a Comfort Zone," informs teachers on the relationship between differentiated instruction and the learning environment. The authors suggest that "a differentiated classroom respects diversity, a differentiated classroom maintains high expectations, and a differentiated classroom generates openness" (p. 14). According to the authors, "real differentiation can begin" (p. 32) when this atmosphere exists. These same qualities are offered as sound bites to allay student or parent concerns about equity and fairness in a classroom that offers differentiated instruction.

Chapter Three addresses the second guiding question and discusses "Preassessment: Who Already Understands It or Can Do It?" Here the authors offer insights on how preassessments should be used to gather data about students' prior knowledge. They suggest using data from the end-of-the-previous-unit assessments, end-of-the-unit assessments, K-W-Ls, mind maps, asking the five most difficult questions, open-ended questions, interest and experience inventories and the adapted Situational Leadership model. Each data-generating tool is explained. The authors stress the need for accurate records of any preassessment data to document each student's learning progress. As they point out, "Preassessment makes differentiation strategies defensible" (p. 36).

Chapter Four directs practitioners on the benefits of "Differentiating Learning Experiences with Bloom's Taxonomy." The authors explain, "Differentiating the process dimension of learning experiences works to keep all students studying the same concept but at levels matching their readiness. Everyone contributes to the discussion from the vantage point of various learning experiences" (p. 69). This chapter ends the ingredients section for teachers preparing a lesson.

Chapters Five and Six detail two tools with which to combine the information gathered in Chapters 1-4. Chapter Five explains "Differentiating with Venn Diagrams" while Chapter Six offers "Think-Tac-Toe: A Tool for Differentiating." According to the authors, the "Think-Tac-Toe in Chapter 6 meshes with product differentiation [while] the Venn diagram strategy is an excellent vehicle for process and content differentiation" (p. 72). The intellectual power of the Think-Tac-Toe strategy, the authors report, is in the instructor's selection of which products to place in each square of the chart, the rubrics associated with each task, and helping students take responsibility for their learning outcomes. Multiple examples are provided.

Final chapters offer strategies on how to present the lesson and manage successful learning groups and the importance of assessment to document students' academic growth. The authors offer a short excerpt on Authentic Assessments and a more detailed explanation of Developing and Assessing Products Tool (DAP Tool). The book concludes with a very short discussion of how to build support for differentiated classrooms both within the school and across a district's learning centers.

The organization of this text mirrors that of a cookbook. It offers a very practical, step-by-step handbook for teachers struggling to meet the academic needs of each learner in their classroom. As such, teachers looking for detailed directions on how to differentiate existing lesson plans will be satisfied with this text.

That said, the text draws from a very limited research-base. Tenuous connections highlight the importance of constructing a learning environment that is learner-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered (National Research Council, 2004). At the same time, the authors do not link the noted strategies to any learning theory (e.g., constructivism, situated learning, behaviorism, social learning, or conceptual change). Instead they describe instructional practices that "combine content, process, and product" (p. 50). This focus on instruction rather than student learning fails to acknowledge research that

suggests successful learning opportunities are built upon the theoretical foundations of constructivism, metacognition, scaffolding, within students' zones of proximal development, and constructed to mimic the role of expert performance (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2004). Research on effective pedagogy points to the importance of teachers and students working together, developing language and literacy skills across all curriculum, connecting lessons to students' lives, engaging learners with challenging lessons, and emphasizing dialogue over lectures (Center for Research on Education Diversity and Excellence, 2002). The authors also fail to offer any research that reports any value-added to student learning by teachers using differentiated instruction.

Teacher education has a long history of being a-theoretical (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). That history erodes our credibility and creates policy conversations about improving teacher quality by circumventing preparation programs and minimizing the value of ongoing professional learning. The absence of a research base raises questions about the added value of using this text in the preparation of new teachers or in graduate courses for in-service professional educators.

Footnotes

¹This reviewer holds the assumption that differentiated instruction benefits students with a wide range of academic needs, not just those identified as gifted.

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Reviewed by Barbara L. Bales, Ph.D., University of Wisconsin D Milwaukee

Schlieder, Mary (2007). *With Open Arms: Creating School Communities of Support for Kids with Social Challenges Using Circle of Friends, Extracurricular Activities and Learning Teams*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing .

Pages: 132 Price: \$19.95 ISBN: 9781931282482

How do members of a learning community develop social supports for students with Asperger Syndrome and related disabilities? The detailed steps can be found in this book by an education professional who has spent years "in the trenches." While much of the relevant literature focuses on the *why* of social inclusion, social adaptability, and social skills instruction for students with disabilities, the practical aspects or the *how-to* methods are often diminished. This how-to book addresses the practical aspects of social supports, inclusion, and adaptability through a triangulated approach: Circle of Friends, Extra-Curricular Activities, and Learning Teams.

The author takes the concept of *Circle of Friends* (Attwood, 2006) and breaks it down into simple, easy to use steps for implementation. She provides realistic exemplars and case scenarios from her own experiences and supports her ideas with charts, checklists, and bibliographic illustrations. *With Open Arms* reaches out wider to address the empathetic and proactive needs of general curriculum teachers in the child's circle. Schlieder shows how extra curricular activities can be planned or arranged by special education teachers to develop empathy in general ed teachers and to provide these teachers with educative strategies and ideas for students whose social deficits are often overlooked in the day-to-day operation of a school. The author provides implementation considerations with numerous examples based on student interests, motivation, and relationships with adults. Finally, the book uses the notion of teams that operate within learning communities to help educators understand the nature of the child's disabilities and address the resultant needs. The concept is similar to a book guild, except that the child's special education teacher selects books for the team that specifically address needs of the student, school, or learning environment. Several books are presented with guiding questions for team leaders.

From a practical standpoint, *With Open Arms* brings social structures, supports, empathy, and educative strategies to school faculty and staff in a user-friendly way. Without the detailed steps outlined in Schlieder's book, students with social deficits would be left once again to fend for themselves feeling isolated, alone, and even bullied. Every educator everywhere should consider using circles, activities, and teams to develop social supports and help them meet the needs of their students. Most educators know why. This book provides the how.

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Reviewed by Cheryl A. Young, Ed. D., BCABA, Assistant Professor, University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Shields, Carolyn M. (2007). *The Bakhtin Primer*. New York: Peter Lang.

Pages: 189 Price: \$ 18.95 ISBN: 978-0-8204-8188-3

As educators become increasingly aware of the importance of language and dialog in the classroom, names and knowledge in other fields such as psycholinguistics, speech and language, and psychology are becoming part of our vocabulary. Certainly the rise of Vygotsky and the tremendous additions of his work has influenced our thinking about learning in a socio cultural context and enriched our classroom practice

A well-known 20th century voice in literary criticism circles and a philosopher of language, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin offers some novel and original ways to think about dialog and *praxis*—the thinking and action of educators and educational leaders. In my opinion his original works (translated) are too often cloaked heavily in literary reference and obtuse language; thus making reading Bakhtin, much like Vygotsky, a bit pedantic and almost circular for the student.

Shields has produced, by far, the easiest access to Bakhtin for teachers and practitioners available. Readers are literally guided through the theory and its ramifications without becoming lost in the allusions or referents. She has managed to masterfully give the reader the "vocabulary" needed to take the theory to practice. The examples she uses to illustrate theory are concrete without being pabulum. The theory is explicated without being diluted to oversimplification. It is indeed a primer, but a primer that will give the student the necessary tools to take the study of Bakhtin further.

In some ways Bakhtin's works are a Mobius band; there is no one entry, direction or sequence that is invariably correct. The connections between conceptual pieces are intertwined. Shields carefully unwinds Bakhtin without disturbing meaning or continuity; the reader is given adequate guidance to put the terminology and theory together. Her device is rather simple; she puts the terms boldly to the left of the text and slowly page by page adds depth and meaning. I found that this slow devolving of meaning made me appreciate the richness of the theory and terminology without being overwhelmed by it.

Although Bakhtin died in 1975, Shields keeps his thinking relevant by tying him to many current writers and thinkers such as Delpit, Levine, Bourdieu, Fullan, etc. The work becomes even more alive as she ties it to thought and practice in the modern classroom. The ontology of language, dialog being the means and ends of our existence, is part of much of the current thinking about education, particularly education that resonates with the cultural milieu of the student. Perhaps the concept, which Shields illustrates best throughout the book, is the link between dialog and student agency. Bakhtin believes that dialog allows persons to gain personal agency or power over circumstance. This is a powerful instructional and affirming concept for a beginning teacher to consider.

The book concludes with a stout, lengthy and rather straightforward connection to the classroom. The chapter, "Schooling with a difference" enables the reader to visualize how Bakhtin can apply to real classroom practice. It is almost as if Shields wants to punctuate the end of the book with reality. It works.

What students would benefit from this book? Certainly graduate students in multicultural studies, curriculum and lesson design, and foundational courses would be enriched by this text. As a professor, I can certainly see the uses of this book in educational psychology classes as an additive to Vygotsky in particular.

Making the difficult doable is the mark of a great teacher; Shields has done that with this primer.

Reviewed by Kathleen Spencer Cooter, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Special Education, University of

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