Brief reviews for January 2008

Bender, Alexandra Sabina (2007). *Alana's Advice: Where There is a Clique You've Got to Think Quick.* Bethel, CT: Crown House Pub.

Pages: 151   Price: $12.95   ISBN: 9781845900755

Alana's Advice is a fictional account of events in a middle school, during the final two weeks before the start of summer vacation. Alana, the protagonist, writes an advice column for her school newspaper and her friend Jackie is a contributor to the paper as well. They conflict with the editor, their classmate Jane. The story follows Alana's frustration with Jane's behaviors and her triumph over the petty scheming, jealousies and fights. Alana's advice is to be both smart and compassionate in responding to bullies. The ability to take the perspective of the bully and recognize their challenges helps turn Alana from a target into a friend.

What makes the book exceptional is the age of the author. *Alana's Advice* is a very mature piece of writing for a twelve or thirteen year old. The author is either incredibly insightful about conflict resolution or a resourceful writer. The story itself mirrors much of the research literature on the impact of strong and authentic relationships with friends, family and adults, in building resilience in adolescents.

The structuring of each chapter with an anecdote is engaging. Yet it is hard not to be somewhat skeptical about the sudden turnarounds and role reversals in the characters. Things rarely turn around that fast in school settings. The sub-heading of "Where there is a clique" also is somewhat misleading because the book is mostly about interactions with one girl, not a clique. This character, Jane, is represented as vengeful, mean and authoritarian. She is also described in sensory terms: smelling of make up and chemical products. By the descriptions provided in the book it is unclear whether Jane is actually powerful or widely loathed or possibly both. Jackie remains a sidekick most of the time with few insights of her own. Moreover the story telling itself is not consistent. Some pages were tedious in the descriptions and never quite as engrossing as they could be, possibly because the reader never actually feels much compassion for Alana. The book also has grammatical and typographical errors in places.

The girls and in fact, all the students at this fictional school seem Caucasian and somewhat indistinguishable in the descriptions of their appearance. The setting of the school and the various activities of the students imply privilege and a higher socioeconomic background. Many of the specific references might not be relevant for children outside of this demographic.

Despite these shortcomings the book is a valiant effort and its true test will lie in whether the advice, the writing style and the content are meaningful and relevant to Alana's peer group. Teachers could use the book to encourage discussion and self-expression surrounding interpersonal challenges and bullying in middle schools. The author's age can be another point of discussion and whether a peer's perspective is more meaningful to students than that of an adult.

Reviewed by Girija Kaimal, EdD, MA, EdM, Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

Bishop, Rudine Sims (2007). *Free within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Pages: 295   Price: $22.00   ISBN: 0-325-07135-7

Rudine Sims Bishop, the author of *Free within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature* is a familiar name in the realms of children's literature, multicultural education, and literacy education as an educator, mentor, and researcher. In her long career, she has also been an essayist (*Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*, 2003), an editor (*Kaleidoscope: A Multicultural Booklist for Grades K-8*, 1994), and an author (*Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction*, 1982; *Presenting Walter Dean Myers*, 1991).

This exemplary author has created an exemplary text. As its title states, *Free within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature* covers the development of works created by African Americans about African Americans both as authors and illustrators. It concentrates on fiction and poetry written for children up to the age of fourteen, (grades pre-K-8).

The introduction of the book succinctly covers issues related to the paucity, when compared to the total publishing output of children's literature, of African-American authored and illustrated children's literature about African Americans and their life experiences. There is also an overview of the external social, economic and political factors which negatively affected the development of a flourishing body of work. Throughout the book, Bishop employs an intriguing, approachable conversational style, making deeper philosophical and critical concepts easily understandable to both lay and professional or academic readers.

Following this introduction, the text embarks on a comprehensive chronological journey describing the development of an oral tradition in African American people during slavery, the quest for literacy and education during and just after slavery, and the development of a children's literature accurately reflecting the life experiences of African American children up to the present time. All of this is described in the context of the existing social, political and economic forces of the times along with comparisons to developments in "mainstream" children's literature.

The first chapter covers the pioneering works, many by women, found primarily in church-supported periodicals of the nineteenth century. Then Bishop surges into the twentieth century. One chapter is devoted to the *Brownies' Book*, the celebrated children's magazine created in 1920 by W.E.B. Dubois, Jessie Fauset, and Augustus Dill. Succeeding chapters cover the works of authors, poets, and illustrators whose contributions though vital, are now forgotten. A multitude of well-known authors, illustrators and poets such as Langston Hughes (whose first literary efforts and high school graduation were highlighted in the *Brownies' Book*), Arna Bontemps, Ellen Tarry, Virginia Hamilton, Walter Dean Myers, John Steptoe, Jacqueline Woodson, Christopher Paul Curtis are also discussed.

Each chapter also considers the movements and philosophies that affected the development of the literature and the genres which were explored as a result. These include the mid-century Civil Rights, Intercultural Education, Multicultural Education and Black Arts Movements and concepts such as "cultural authenticity" and "liberation literature." In addition, the author provides a critical evaluation of the works covered and an estimation of their historic and present-day literary value.

Each chapter contains a bibliography of young adult and children's resources mentioned. The bibliographies can be used to highlight gaps in library collections and the cultural literacy of the reader. Sadly, many of the young adult and children's works cited are out of print, proving again the need for acceptance and widespread reading of writers and illustrators from "parallel cultures," Virginia Hamilton's preferred term for "minorities" (p. 198). All other resources are mentioned in the reference lists at the end of the book. There is an inset section of illustrations reproduced in black-and-white between pages 176 and 177, containing examples of the art of the illustrators discussed in Chapters 8 and 9. The book also contains a combined index of subjects, titles, and authors and illustrators.

The uses of this book are many: as a supplementary text for children's literature, literacy education and elementary education courses; and, as a literary history for African-American studies courses. For those familiar with African American children's literature and its historical development, this book will prove a cogent, comprehensive, accessible one-volume resource. For those unfamiliar with the subject, this book will be a revelatory introduction. It can also be used as a resource through its bibliographies and reference list to discover previous scholarship on the topic, as well as pioneering literature that may have disappeared from many library and resource collections and pertinent current literature that should be included. In our diverse society, this is an essential, required text for students, educators, librarians, and faculty.

References

Brownies' Book. [Electronic Version](1920, January -1921, November). Digital Collections From the Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress. Retrieved December 13, 2007 from

http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi- bin/ampage?collId=rbc3&fileName=rbc0001_2004ser01351page.db

Fox, D.L. & Short, K.G. (Eds.) (2003). *Stories matter: The complexity of cultural authenticity in children's literature.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Reviewed by Sheila Kirven, Education Services Librarian, New Jersey City University, Jersey City, NJ.

Higgerson, Mary Lou & Joyce, Teddi A. (2007). *Effective Leadership Communication: A Guide for Department Chairs and Deans for Managing Difficult Situations and People.* **Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.**

Pages: 268   Price: $40.00   ISBN: 978-1-933371-19-1

There are multiple operational models that define higher education and likely multiple effective ways to address the issues facing higher education. However according to Mary Lou Higgerson and Teddi A. Joyce there is most likely a single phrase that defines how to be successful in every model: "Live in the sunshine" (p. 61).

The authors offer case studies as a helpful guide through complex scenarios that might be hard to conceptualize from multiple perspectives. Although the administration approves the institutional mission, "the curriculum is typically owned by the faculty" (p. 6); is administrative curriculum direction appropriate? The theoretical overt archetype Dr. Schmidt can excel in herculean tasks, yet his curriculum is impenetrable to palpable reason; should he be reprimanded, or "should you issue an ultimatum?"(p. 11). The struggling untenured Dr. Chessman has "mediocre student evaluations" (p. 119); do you review or revise his methods? Diametrically opposed views can grid-lock discussions and cause the hypothetical Dr. Collins to emote; do you exclude her for fear that discussion will "provoke anger or defensiveness?" (p. 236).

The authors of *Effective Leadership Communication* are both vice-presidents in higher education with exceptional experience and track records on which to draw. They have taken that simple concept – live in the sunshine – and developed it into a concise text. The book accommodates the myriad of issues facing chairs and deans by formulating realistic practices for daily use. Granted, the issues facing higher education are dynamic and fluctuate under such shifting conditions as national disaster, political turmoil, diminishing resources and fluctuating tax bases. So while it may be difficult to summarize the issues facing higher education, or facing chairs and deans, the authors have established a framework defining the skills it takes to be successful regardless of the issues.

Through fifteen chapters formatted into three sections, the authors have structured the text such that it can work both as a user's guide and as a quick reference. Consistent with Daryl R. Leaming's (2004) text that establishes the origin of leadership as self-reflection, ("Above all else, academic deans and department chairs–and all leaders–must come to terms with and accept who they are" [p. 1]); Higgerson and Joyce establish three central themes: know yourself, know your audience and expect trouble. The authors discuss issues in real terms and then follow-up the more open discussion with specific straight forward summaries. You can easily find the skills, tactics and concepts Higgerson and Joyce advocate in the text being utilized in hypothetical situations throughout it to convey a comprehensive message. From managing people, to being "able to say that the idea was reviewed" (p.188), to getting the most out of people where good enough is not good enough any longer, the text presents a cohesive multidimensional message. Interestingly you can conceptualize how the authors might have envisioned this book in terms of the medieval trivium: logic, grammar and rhetoric.

Initially, the authors differentiate building a communication foundation from developing communication style in terms of logic. Here the authors weave an intricate web of antidotal progression focusing more on how chairs and deans should guide themselves and anchor their decisions to create "a publicly shared logic" (p. 24). They work hard to keep the focus on the chair and dean even while increasing involvement and discussion with other people whom may be "less informed" (p. 24). The authors stress how and why a new leader establishes himself or herself in the context of relationships. They use case studies to support the reader through this journey and anchor the chairs and deans' decisions in support of the administration's institutional mission.

It is no surprise that they would focus the reader to understand how and why the chair or dean acts and what the chair or dean shares with the faculty and administration. This focus is important because, as the authors note, all the concerned parties will be doing exactly that – guessing what the chair or dean is thinking. Understanding how others view the role and actions of the chair or dean can substantially enable that leader

to know how to communicate with others. Even though sharing is ubiquitous throughout the text, Higgerson and Joyce still suggest caution "to consider the salient points and determine how much information can be shared with others" (p. 45).

As Higgerson and Joyce progress into grammar, the facet appropriately changes to how and why the chair or dean chooses his or her words. The message should really be understood in its most broad sense of sharing the human experience, both through actions and words. The specifics of the message are of critical importance. It should not surprise any reader that certain words or phrases set off immediate visceral reactions. The authors take appropriate time in the text to assist chairs and deans to develop skills for viewing and conveying content in context, refocus issues in terms of the institutional mission and desensitize issues when considering how to approach shared communication.

The authors use the same rich discussions, case-studies and arguments in developing concepts relating toward communicating with constituents. The authors highlight the importance of framing goals, decisions and information for the hypothetical Dr. Schmidt and Dr. Chessman in multiple case study scenarios. Accepting human nature as part of the human experience, Higgerson and Joyce recommend against surprises and in favor of being predictable. If faculty and staff know what to expect, then they should not be surprised by when or how you act in your capacity as chair or dean.

Although this book is directed toward managing difficult situations and people in higher education, I feel the authors have mischaracterized faculty as "typically [lacking] understanding of the institutional context" (p. 51). This misinterpretation tends to set a comprehensively negative connotation that all faculty members are ignorant of the bigger picture and seldom access "from a broader, institutional context" (p. 51). Managing diversity extends beyond simply noting that action has a larger purpose based on the mission, it also respects multiple interpretations of the mission.

Taken together logic and grammar should be used to create rhetoric for everyone; a persuasive message anchored in the institutional mission and framed in context. This really is the comprehensive description and analytical process of accommodating all personality types. The authors use case studies to strategically explain how decisions that seem against common sense and analytical thought can even help the overtly emotional Dr. Collins relate to the institutional mission. When the process may seem counter-productive, the authors discuss how each decision is ultimately helpful to chairs and deans as leaders. It is important to note that the chair or dean is a leader of even those that do not want to be lead. The authors develop reasonable steps the chair or dean can take to support and enable all participants to interact beneficially, even if they do not want to interact at all.

Ultimately though, Higgerson and Joyce elaborate effectively on leading five specific types of difficult faculty; a process "similar to herding cats or frogs" (p. 179). The case studies are a helpful literary device to guide the reader through complex scenarios that might be hard to conceptualize from multiple perspectives.

This text clearly builds a pragmatic program that any reasonably minded chair or dean can turn into real-world results. The text warrants attention whether you are a chair, a dean, a faculty member or simply have a job in higher education. The methodology clearly benefits chairs and deans, but it also encourages appreciation of other people's views, a skill we all can benefit using–even those that might typically lack understanding of the institutional context.

References

Leaming, D. R., (2004). *Managing people: A guide for department chairs and deans.* Bolton, Massachusetts: Anker Publishing Company.

Reviewed by Reviewed by Blair Copeland, EDHE 6720, University of North Texas.

Horn, Martha & Giacobbe, Mary Ellen (2007). *Talking, Drawing, and Writing: Lessons for Our Youngest Writers.* Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Pages: 276   Price: $24.00   ISBN: 978-157110-456-4

Talking, Drawing, and Writing: Lessons for Our Youngest Writers by Martha Horn and Mary Ellen Giacobbe begins by exploring the importance of talk for developing writers in kindergarten. Because, as they point out, talk is one of the basic symbol systems, they see talk as more than just a way to rehearse ideas for writing. Rather, it allows children to expand on their thinking, and therefore come to understand better what it is they want to communicate. This book's focus on storytelling as worthy of instructional time is unique to books

about writing with young children. Oral language, which is foundational to literacy development, has not received enough attention from researchers, policymakers, or practitioners. By way of introducing the thinking behind this book, the authors explain that they deliberately chose not to focus on genres like poetry or informational texts because their belief is that children's stories are the "heart and soul of our work" and deserve a book dedicated to them.

As the authors explain their reasons for focusing on teaching children to tell stories, it's obvious that the authors truly understand children. They reveal their vast experience of how children behave, how children write, the kinds of barriers children may face as they write, and they explain in plain language how to support children as they grow as storytellers (oral, written, and drawn). Also, the authors tell stories about classrooms, teachers, and children. Stories, which are a powerful way of coming to understand, are a strong strand throughout the book, even finding their way into the lessons themselves. Finally, the authors underline the importance of teachers telling stories because they often don't understand that they themselves indeed have stories worth telling. As a teacher educator, I've seen this to be true in terms of teachers becoming comfortable with writing in front of children, which might be easier for teachers if they began with storytelling.

The authors, in their work over the years with young children, have decided that drawing is worth teaching. Since drawing is a form of writing for young children, they deserve to have instruction that helps them to draw well, and that means that just as with writing, teachers need to model drawing in front of their children and talking with them about how to communicate their intended meaning through drawing. Though children naturally draw symbolically, the authors have found that teaching them about how to draw in a representational way does not interfere with their natural instincts; they seem to blend symbolic and representation drawing into one. Drawing is also important because it provides students who aren't yet writing with letters and words a way to communicate. Drawing also provides another path for children to develop language.

In order to teach students to draw representationally, they begin with specific lessons on drawing and by having students record their learning in sketchbooks. They also study the illustrations in specific mentor texts, such as *My Dog Rosie* written by Isabelle Harper and illustrated by Barry Moser. They don't expect that children will transfer this learning to their Drawing and Writing Books fully and immediately, but rather incrementally.

The main work that children do at the beginning of the year is in these Drawing and Writing books, which are easy for children to manage in early kindergarten. They are described and photographed in detail so that teachers can replicate them in their own classrooms. Later in the year, when it becomes clear that students are ready to move to multi- page stories, they are introduced to booklets—stapled, lined paper with covers. Lessons for why, how, and when to introduce booklets are provided.

The authors resisted providing lessons to teachers for years, but then realized that some lessons are needed by all children, while other lessons have to be created specifically for the context in which a teacher is working. The lessons provided in this book all include an explanation of the context for the lesson, the lesson itself, and materials needed. Embedded in the lessons are examples of language used by actual teachers with actual students, which helps the reader imagine how to teach the lesson in his or her own classroom.

Teaching children to write words and sentences also receives attention in this book. Through interactive writing, students see writing modeled by the teacher and peers. Through working in their Drawing and Writing books, and with teacher support, students who have come to school without extensive knowledge of letters and words learn to communicate their meaning through recording the initial sound of words. There are lessons for how to teach students to record initial sounds and the prominent sounds, how to write words that are known and don't need to be sounded out, and how to write sentences.

Assessment is addressed in a separate chapter. Teachers are shown how to look at children's writing and drawing in terms of what they can do, in terms of the craft of writing as well as the conventions of writing. The point of looking closely as students' writing is to determine what needs to be taught. This is systematically supported in the Cumulative Writing Record, which is included as an appendix.

Clearly, the main audience for this book is kindergarten teachers, but it would also be useful to all teachers in the PreK-2 range, literacy coaches, principals, and teacher educators. It would work well as the focus for a study group of kindergarten teachers, who would find the appendices with reproducible forms, the lessons, and the photographs especially helpful for putting the ideas into practice.

Reviewed by Sylvia Read, who teaches language arts methods and children's literature to preservice and inservice teachers at Utah State University. Her research interests include writing instruction practices in K-5 classrooms, the reading and writing of nonfiction texts with primary grade students,

and the authenticity and quality of multicultural literature for children.

Merrell, Kenneth W.; Parisi, Danielle M. & Whitcomb, Sara A. (2007). *Stong Start: A Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum, Grades K- 2.* **Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.**

Pages: 132   Price: $34.95   ISBN: 9781557669292

Over the past two decades, wider social, political and economic forces are having an undeniable impact on our nation's youngest, most vulnerable citizens—our children. Many families today are living under tremendously stressful conditions such as unemployment, family instability, increased concentrated poverty, and alienation. For the most defenseless members within the family unit, such extreme stressors have a direct impact. Educational research identifies increasing instances of problem behavior and mental health issues in young children resulting in increased rates of school exclusion. Gilliam (2005) found that the pre-kindergarten expulsion rate is 3.2 times higher than the rate for K-12 students. This may indicate a simultaneous problem wherein educators lack preparation to deal with difficult behavior and real incidences of problem behavior and mental health issues in young children. Moreover, accountability pressures continue to promote practices in primary education with a narrowed focus on academic skills and testing at the expense of social and emotional learning. Yet, attending systematically to students' social and emotional skills has been shown to increase academic achievement, decrease problem behavior, and enhance the quality of relationships surrounding each child (Elias et al., 1997).

Unfortunately, current trends indicate an increasing reliance on the use of school exclusion and psychiatric medication (Olfman, 2006) as quick remedies to address children's emotional and mental health and problem behaviors. As such, there is an urgent need to arm educators with alternatives that increase students' capacity to self-regulate their emotions and behavior in school and all other environments. Providing concrete guidance to schools, educators and families, within a framework of prevention, affords children the critical skills required for success in the short and long term. In *Strong Start: A Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum for Grades K-2*, Merrell, Parisi & Whitcomb provide such guidance in an exceptionally useful, practical, and straightforward manner.

Rooted in developmental research and professional practical experience, the *Strong Start* curriculum provides schools and teachers serving our youngest students with a carefully designed universal prevention program to help them build social emotional resiliency and competence. Some of the specific curriculum goals include teaching children: to identify and understand their feelings *and* other people's feelings; appropriate ways to express feelings; to understand the link between how they think, behave and feel; skills to monitor and modify their feelings, thoughts and behaviors; behavioral and affective techniques to relax and remain calm in times of stress or worry; effective communication skills. There are ten main lessons and two "booster" lessons that include explicit step- by-step guidance for teachers. Each lesson incorporates the use of literature and hands on activities. A "feelings" bingo game is even provided in the appendices.

There are several other noteworthy aspects of the curriculum. First, as opposed to "shot in the arm" lessons, this curriculum provides clear guidance for teachers to embed key lesson ideas throughout the school day and school year so there is continual reinforcement of the core of each lesson. Correspondingly, the curriculum was designed as a companion to the evidence based *Strong Kids* curriculum for grades 3-5 and 6-8; and *Strong Teens* program for adolescents for ongoing social-emotional learning. Second, the authors address at length the importance of cultural responsiveness when implementing the curriculum and explicate specific strategies for making cross-cultural adaptations to better fit the needs of diverse children. This is also reflected in the images used within the curriculum that represent children from all racial and ethnic groups. Third, the curriculum is low in cost and comes with a CD that facilitates teacher sharing of materials. Finally, embedded in the curriculum is promotion of family involvement. Each lesson has a brief "Strong Start Bulletin" addressed to the family that describes the week's lesson in easy to understand language and suggests books relevant to the lesson for at-home reading. Most importantly, the Bulletin provides key lesson ideas as bullet points for application in the home environment. In short, *Strong Start* is a phenomenal, comprehensive, and practical curriculum that no K-2 teacher should be without!

References

Elias, M.J., Zins, J.E., Weissberg, R.P., Frey, K.S., Greenberg, M.T., Haynes, N.M, et al. (1997). *Promoting social and emotional learning: Guidelines for educators*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum.

Gilliam, W.S. (2005). *Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems*. New Haven, CT.: Yale University Child Study Center.

Olfman, S. (2006). *No child left different*. Westport, CT.: Praeger.

Reviewed by Judi Vanderhaar, University of Louisville College of Education and Human Development.

Opitz, Michael F. (2007). *Don't Speed – Read!: 12 Steps to Smart and Sensible Fluency Instruction.* New York: Scholastic.

Pages: 128   Price: $17.99   ISBN: 0-439-92650-

With the publication of *Don't Speed – Read!* Michael Opitz has combined the recent research works of major researchers in the area of reading fluency into an excellent, brief, very readable summary for teachers. This book is aimed at elementary school teachers who are looking for the optimum methods to teach fluency to young readers. His twelve steps, framed as chapters in the book, lead the reader from a definition of fluency through assessment and planning for instruction with meaningful activities, to communication with families. For researchers, this book also offers suggestions for further research into teaching fluency and other related topics. Drawing upon many other experts in the field, Opitz provides a wealth of valuable information, both in the text and in the charts that accompany each chapter.

Opitz points out that there is little consensus in the professional literature for a definition of fluency. His definition, reading with speed, accuracy and prosody for the sake of better comprehension of text, seems to be a logical one based on recent research. Many researchers and classroom teachers use one or two of the above three components,(Pikulski, 2006) but Opitz suggests that using all three components as a basis for assessment and instruction in elementary school will produce optimum results for children. He also comments that what constitutes "fluency" fluctuates with various factors such as reader motivation and/or background knowledge, text topic and/or difficulty, and the reading environment (p. 9). Opitz also notes that a teacher's view of how to best teach reading is inexorably bound to how that teacher assesses and plans for instruction. Along with Pressley, Opitz suggests that not only do teacher beliefs guide actions but student learning is maximized when teachers are able to articulate "why they do what they do" (Pressley, et. al. 2001).

This book is one in a series called, "Theory and Practice." Chapters are brief, typically 6 to 8 pages, but nevertheless, are full of important information. Each chapter ends with a "reflection" section. This section contains a chart for the reader to use to summarize chapter information as well as a blank page on which the reader may create a summary statement. This addition to each chapter makes this book an excellent choice for professional development seminars and teacher "study groups" as well as being useful to any teacher who individually wishes to pursue professional development and increased professional knowledge.

Each chapter is also accompanied by charts that clearly delineate important concepts. Chapter 4 contains charts to assess children's fluency and charts for children to assess their own fluency. Chapter 5 contains many excellent activities that can be used to promote fluency. Two appendices also contain forms for assessment and more excellent fluency activities for children. While these are clearly designed for teachers (a typical activity begins, "Students read," or "The teacher reads") nevertheless, many could be done by parents at home with a single child or with 2 or 3 children. Chapter 11, "Communicating with Parents," notes that many parents really don't know what to do to help their children become readers. Saying, "Read to your child," as teachers have done for years, is not enough for the parent who has no experience of being read to as a child. That parent needs more explicit information about what teachers expect when they say, "Read to your child." Many of the activities in Chapter 5 and in Appendix B could be easily adapted for a newsletter home to parents with suggested activities for parent and child.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone who teaches young children to read, whether classroom teacher or reading specialist. This book is filled with a wealth of information as well as suggestions for planning for instruction, assessing fluency, providing an optimum classroom environment, and working with parents. With each page I turned, I could see how I could use this book with my college students, both undergraduate Elementary Education majors and graduate majors who are preparing to be Reading Specialists. This is an excellent professional resource.

References

Pikulski, J. (2006). Fluency: A developmental and language perspective. In S. J. Samuels & A. Fargstrup (eds.) *What research has to say about fluency instruction* (pp. 70 Ð 93). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Pressley, M.; Allington, R.L.; Wharton-McDonald, R.; Block, C.C. & Morrow, L.M. (2001). *Learning To Read:*

Lessons from Exemplary First- Grade Classrooms. New York: Guilford.

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.

Tufte, Edward R. (2006). *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within.* **Second edition. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press LLC.**

Pages: 31   Price: $7.00   ISBN: 978-0961392161

PowerPoint was recently listed by authors in *USA Today* as one of the top 25 inventions "…that changed our lives since 1982" (Acohido, Hopkins, Graham, & Kessler, 2007). The authors boast that, "lecturers from CEOs to sixth-graders display topic headings and charts with the click of a mouse" (PowerPoint section). While we could argue about the significance of certain things on the their top 25 list (e.g., lettuce in a bag), we whole heartedly agree that PowerPoint has "changed public speaking forever" (PowerPoint section).

The use of PowerPoint (and slideware software in general) has become ubiquitous; whether in a corporate board meeting or a classroom, PowerPoint is commonplace. In fact, it is estimated that over 30 million PowerPoint presentations are given each day(Weinstein, 2006). This rise in popularity has attracted supporters and critics alike. Supporters can be found in every school, college, and university throughout the country; critics are fewer, but their numbers are steadily growing.

The most notable, or at least the most vocal, critic of PowerPoint is Edward Tufte. *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint* is a brief monograph, or treatise, that is a must read for any PowerPoint user and every educator. Throughout *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint*, Tufte argues the following:

1. PowerPoint's low resolution is inadequate to display rich content.
2. PowerPoint's low resolution encourages bulleted outlines which dilute thought.
3. PowerPoint's deeply hierarchical and linear structure decontextualizes and hides information.
4. PowerPoint has a tendency to fragment narrative and data.
5. PowerPoint encourages a preoccupation with format, conspicuous decoration, and phluff rather than content.

We will focus on elaborating on each of these points.

Low Resolution
Tufte argues that PowerPoint's low resolution makes it difficult to display information rich data-content. Unlike paper or computer screens, PowerPoint slides typically contain very little information. Regular users are very familiar with running out of room on a slide.

Bullet Lists
Related to low resolution, Tufte argues that PowerPoint encourages the use (and overuse) of bullet outlines, which dilute thought, narrative, and data. He is especially critical of the use of PowerPoint in our classrooms. He argues,

> Instead for writing a report using sentences, children learn how to decorate client pitches and infomercials…student PP exercises (as seen in teacher's guides, and in student work posted on the internet) typically show 5 to 20 words and a piece of clip art on each slide in a presention consisting of 3 to 6 slides – a total of perhaps 80 words (20 seconds of silent reading) for a week of work. Rather than being trained as mini-bureaucrats in the pitch culture, students would be better off if schools closed down on PP days and everyone went to The Exploratorium. Or wrote an illustrated essay explaining something. (p. 7)

While Tufte fails to demonstrate convincingly that the use of bullet outlines make people stupid or children illiterate, the use of bullet outlines can encourage oversimplification and decontextualization of material; the use of multiple layered bullets can further decontextualize material by blurring connections and relationships between points.

Hierarchical and Linear Structure
Tufte also criticizes PowerPoint for being deeply hierarchical and linear. By default, PowerPoint is a very linear tool. In fact, this is possibly part of its appeal for educators. However, despite the default hierarchical

and linear structure, PowerPoint does not have to be used in a linear and hierarchical way. For instance, by typing in the number of a slide and hitting enter, a presenter can advance to any slide in a presentation. Thus, Tufte's criticism of PowerPoint's hierarchical and linear structure has more to do with the way presenters think about and plan presentations—that is, the cognitive style of PowerPoint—than with the tool itself. However, PowerPoint does seem to encourage hierarchical and linear presentations through its default settings and "auto content" wizards.

Preoccupation with Format

Tufte is very critical of PowerPoint's preoccupation with format, conspicuous decoration, and phluff; in fact, Tufte coined the term PowerPoint Phluff to describe the way PowerPoint helps people focus more on decoration and chartjunk than serious analysis. The millions of PowerPoint templates available online alone illustrates Tufte's point that PowerPoint or, perhaps better put, PowerPoint users are preoccupied with format and decoration.

It is our experience that PowerPoint users are also infatuated with clip art. Richard Mayer has illustrated that a picture is not always worth a thousand words. A picture or an image needs to be relevant, or it can actually detract and distract from a presentation and learning. Yet, PowerPoint users continually include unrelated clip art or obnoxious slide transitions, typically in the name of fun.

Throughout *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint*, Tufte essentially argues that presenters (especially those reporting scientific information), would be better off replacing PowerPoint with Word. Rather than identifying strategies to improve the way we use PowerPoint, Tufte seems to suggest that we should simply abandon it for most presentations.

Moving Beyond Tufte

The work of Tufte (2006), Norvig (n.d.), and others is powerful and persuasive. In fact, Wineburg (2004) states that educational researchers should not create a PowerPoint presentation until they have read The *Cognitive Style of PowerPoint* and the work of Norvig.

Tufte focuses a great deal on the tool. He seems to blame a piece of software for the way that humans are using it. One could argue that PowerPoint does not give bad presentations, people give bad presentations. While recognizing the role presenter's play in bad PowerPoint presentations, Tufte argues that PowerPoint is becoming more than just a tool but rather a cognitive style.

PowerPoint is so engrained in our culture that there is an unspoken expectation that in certain environments, one must use PowerPoint. Try to imagine doing a paper presentation at certain major conferences without PowerPoint. You will be labeled a luddite or even worse- technologically illiterate. Or imagine giving a PowerPoint presentation and not handing out the PowerPoint slides? When a tool becomes this deeply ingrained in a culture, it becomes more than just a tool. However, this does not dismiss the fact that how people use PowerPoint is still very much in their control.

Conclusion

Tufte suggests that there is no hope for PowerPoint. His single mindedness is perhaps his main downfall. Tufte's only advice is essentially to abandon its use. Despite the shortcomings of the day-to-day use of PowerPoint in our board rooms, schools, and universities, it is not inherently evil. There is a person behind every poor PowerPoint presentation, and this person is ultimately to blame for any bad decisions. It is time for educators and speakers alike to take responsibility for their poor use of PowerPoint and to take back control over their presentations and lessons. While Tufte does not offer specific strategies on how to improve the way we use PowerPoint, his work is a great starting point by helping us begin to think differently about the software.

References

Acohido, B., Hopkins, J., Graham, J., & Kessler, M. (2007). 25 years of 'eureka' moments. *USA Today*. Retrieved June 1, 2007, from http://www.usatoday.com/news/top25-inventions.htm

Norvig, P. (n.d.). The Gettysburg PowerPoint presentation. Retrieved June 1, 2007, from http://norvig.com/Gettysburg/

Weinstein, H. (2006). PowerPoint misuse raises threat of losing audiences. *The Business Journal of Phoenix*. Retrieved November 1, 2007, from http://phoenix.bizjournals.com/phoenix/stories/2006/10/02/smallb 2.html

Wineburg S. (2004). Must it be this way? Ten rules for keeping your audience awake during conferences. *Educational Researcher, 33*(4), 13-14.

Reviewed by Patrick R. Lowenthal, Assistant Professor – Regis University and John W. White, Assistant Professor – Regis University.