



education review // reseñas educativas

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

editors: gustavo e. fischman melissa cast-brede gene v glass

reseñas educativas (Spanish)  
resenhas educativas (Portuguese)

Brief reviews for December 2009

**Algozzine, Robert; O'Shea, Dorothy J. & Obiakor, Festus E. (2009). *Culturally responsive literacy instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA:Corwin Press.**

**Pages: 208 Price: \$35.95 ISBN: 9781412957748**

In their book *Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction*, editors Bob Algozzine, Dorothy O'Shea, and Festus Obiakor offer valuable information that supports all teachers and educational professionals in applying, managing, and appraising literacy instruction for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This book is appropriate as a resource for educational practitioners and as a textbook book for preservice teachers.

Culturally responsive instruction can bring students of diverse backgrounds to high levels of literacy by promoting engagement through activities that reflect the values, knowledge, and structures of interaction that students bring from home. An important component of this book is the connection of students' backgrounds, interests, and experiences to the standards-based curriculum. Each of the seven chapters are well-written and follow a user-friendly format that includes the introduction of an at-risk student, definition of the topic and key insights from research, descriptions of effective pedagogical approaches at primary, middle and high school levels, and revisiting instruction for the introductory at-risk student. The appendices provide a glossary and references to resources such as suggested readings on cultural diversity, electronic resources, links to audio clips, and information from the National Reading Panel.

The changing demographics in U.S. public schools call for a change in the traditional canon of teaching and learning in schools. As cultural and linguistic diversity increases in our schools, so does the need for culturally relevant instruction. The opening chapter identifies and defines key components of reading instruction, then addresses components of effective teaching. It closed by giving an overview of what culturally responsive teaching is.

"Improving Phonological Processing" is the title of chapter two and deems the concept as, "Probably the most significant advance in the scientific study of reading and related skills" (p. 21). This chapter discusses language and literacy as a means to assist educators in understanding the complex nature of literacy development and distinguishing multiple ways to engage students in literacy learning that results in highly proficient readers, writers, and speakers. Attention is given to research, how literacy skills evolve, development and difficulties, and teaching strategies for primary, middle and high school readers.

Decoding and structural analysis skills are fundamental to reader's ability to sound out and recognize words according to The National Reading Panel (n.d.). Chapter three establishes criteria for improving decoding skills and using basic structural analysis skills associated with a continuum of practice warranted to identify and manipulate the sounds of the English language and decode words, using knowledge of phonics, syllabication, and word parts. A range of leveled activities are highlighted to increase motivation and knowledge, while tables segment the content to clearly illuminate the important concepts and strategies.

Chapter four embraces improving fluency and becoming a competent reader. Activities to empower students to become more fluent are reported, along with the ways to support repeated reading in school and at home that creates a complete educational environment that affirms, accepts and accommodates cultural and linguistic expression, behavior, and thought. It is vital to build bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academics and lived socio-cultural realities. Culturally responsive pedagogy "recognizes, responds to and celebrates fundamental similarities among all cultures offers full, equitable access to education for readers from all cultures" (p. 83).

Types of vocabulary and approaches to teaching vocabulary are the focal point of chapter five. Research-validated strategies that use explicit vocabulary instructional methods that "have shown to improve word knowledge and reading comprehension are included a) the key word method, b) multiple exposures to vocabulary, c) instruction across contexts, d) preinstruction of vocabulary words, e) computer-based instruction, and f) restructuring the task" (p. 107). Assessment of vocabulary knowledge was discussed and suggested that a consistent issue in vocabulary research "is the inability to

document the effects of vocabulary instruction beyond the text-specific comprehension gains to transfer measures" (p. 109). However, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) had proposed a framework for assessing vocabulary that awaits empirical validation.

Essential strategies and particular examples for improving comprehension prevail in chapter six. Guidelines to use explicit comprehension and strategic reading instruction are offered that target the integration of literacy activities linked to child's strengths; background knowledge used for a foundation for newer, higher-level tasks; and explicit, repetitive procedures and visual organizers applied for reinforcement. Author Jeffrey Bakken recommends scaffolding task completion with guided interaction and immediate corrective feedback in order for students to monitor and adjust their reading comprehension.

The final chapter promotes culturally responsive pedagogy that represents key, research-based instructional and organizational approach for educating diverse learners, "To reduce educational tensions, educators and service providers must value different literacy histories unfolding in our schools" (p. 44). The text reiterates that building culturally responsive literacy in the schools and communities requires reshaping the curriculum, student-centered and culturally mediated literacy instruction, and positive interactions with educators, students, parents, families, and communities.

In all, I thought the book offered realistic advice that is grounded in detailed, comprehensive, and practical action for culturally responsive instruction. The introductory chapter entitled "Teaching Children to Read" established the foundation for the chapters that followed. Leveled interventions, which support the five critical areas of teaching reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension are explored in the individual chapters. The exposition of the book provided explanation and analysis to present the five areas with clarity. The case study scenario at the beginning of each chapter invited the reader to actively engage in the content and to process and apply the information when the case scenario was revisited at the end of each chapter. Conclusions drawn are derived logically from research-validated strategies for instruction. I believe that this text is worthwhile and fine text to be shared with all educators.

The final chapter claims "that culturally responsive instructional learning communities are necessary in all grade levels and schools programs to maximize the potential of learners" (p. 140). Through a united effort, we can improve reading achievement for all students by combining scientific, evidence-based literacy research with culturally responsive instruction.

## References

National Reading Panel. (n.d.). Frequently asked questions. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/faq/faq.htm>

Reviewed by Virginia McCormack, Ohio Dominican University.

**Belgrave, Faye Z.; Cherry, Valerie R.; Butler, Deborah S. & Townsend, Tiffany G. (2008). *Sisters of Nia: A Cultural Enrichment Program to Empower African American Girls*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.**

**Pages: 174 Price: \$26.95 ISBN: 0878226060**

It really does take an entire village to raise a child. The importance of communities collaborating with local schools, agencies and families toward the goal of nurturing and supporting our youth is essential. Our young people today have so many negative elements pulling for their attention. Problems are a part of life, they can't be avoided, but the ability to deal with problems is essential to being successful and happy. Providing young people with a safe space to have productive and courageous conversations is important. Providing venues for young people to develop relationships with positive adults within a safe environment is critical.

It is important that communities take a proactive approach in providing positive venues to support young people in becoming productive citizens, with an understanding of personal efficacy and civic responsibility. We are shaped by different aspects of our environment: our family life, our education, our relationships and our community all can influence us in many ways, both positively and negatively. It is important for communities to provide positive programming that support the growth and development of its youth.

As an African American female, I understand the challenges of developing a positive self identity. Many times we may not see ourselves depicted favorably through the media. Television and movie images tend to show our culture and our ethnicity in a less than favorable light. When we see images of who is beautiful or smart, we often don't find ourselves in those images.

Having raised two daughters of my own I searched for community programming that could support my girls in becoming the best that they could be. I went on to serve on boards of organizations that were supporting my quest. One such board was the Girls Incorporated, "a national nonprofit youth organization dedicated to inspiring all girls to be strong, smart, and bold" (Girls Incorporated, 2009). An additional board was the YWCA which "is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all" (YWCA, 2009).

The *Sisters of Nia* is a program that can be used to support the development of positive adolescent identity. The program is designed to empower African American girls. It is aimed at reinforcing and instilling black girls with self-confidence, self-respect and self-reliance while encouraging them to dream big every step of the way in becoming a fulfilled and successful young woman. The curriculum is designed for preadolescent and adolescent girls. This is a very important time in a child's life, they are transitioning from being a child to becoming an adolescent, and they are transitioning into puberty, transitioning from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school. I believe *Sisters of Nia* program serves as a rite of passage. A rite of passage is defined "as a ritual that marks a change in a person's social status" (Absolute Astronomy,

2009).

*Sisters of Nia* is a program that could support and compliment other efforts within the family, school, church or community. The program's objectives are grounded in the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. As many know, Kwanzaa is a week-long celebration honoring African heritage and from December 26 to January 1 (Kwanzaa, 2009).

*Sisters of Nia* offers a framework for helping young African American girls, realize their potential, strength, and beauty. The program objectives are:

- To increase knowledge of and appreciation for African and African American culture
- To increase ethnic pride and identity
- To increase identification with and awareness of successful African American female role models
- To develop critical awareness and skills for analyzing community and media messages
- To increase positive peer relationships and to decrease negative peer interactions
- To increase leadership skills and creativity
- To increase appreciation for the diversity of physical beauty and attractiveness
- To increase knowledge about personal hygiene and health
- To increase life-course expectations regarding education and other achievements (p. 2).

The program accomplishes these objectives by helping young women:

- Learn about and from successful African American female role models
- Learn about and participate in African cultural activities and traditions
- Become aware of racism and sexism and how to deal with these "isms" in community and media messages
- Become aware of negative behaviors and the consequences of such behaviors
- Engage in role-play and team-building activities and exercises designed to promote positive relationships with other females
- Learn the Eight Principles for African American Living (Nguzo Nane) and discover how these principles can be applied to one's functioning in everyday life in the home, school, and community. (pp. 2-3).

This program was designed to be replicated and used by other communities. The program components work to affirm positive identity in young black girls by helping them to learn more about their ethnic and cultural heritage, and by providing a trusting and safe environment where they can communicate and share their dreams. It also provides opportunities for girls to connect with positive role models through the development of intergenerational relationships.

## References

*Girls Incorporated*. (2009). Retrieved from <http://www.girlsinc.org/index.html>

*Kwanzaa*. (2009). Wikipedia.org. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kwanzaa>

Rite of passage. (2009). Absolute Astronomy.com. Retrieved from [http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Rite\\_of\\_passage](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Rite_of_passage)

YWCA. (2009). Retrieved from <http://www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=djISi6PIKpG&b=284783>

**Reviewed by Dr. Karen Hayes, Associate Professor, Educational Administration and Supervision, University of Nebraska at Omaha.**

**Christensen, Clayton M.; Horn, Michael B. & Johnson, Curtis W. (2008). *Disrupting Class: Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*. New York: McGraw Hill.**

**Pages: 288 Price: \$32.95 ISBN: 978-0-070159206-2**

In *Disrupting Class*, Christensen, Horn and Johnson present challenges faced by our schools and explore why they appear to be failing. Five main themes emerge from the book regarding our educational system. These are (a) the dichotomy of standardization and customization, (b) the historical analysis of how we got where we are, (c) innovations that will help us meet the challenges of our time, (d) failure of standard collegiate research approach to provide guidance to educators, and (e) effective use of the "tools of power and separation" (p. 226). These themes throw light on our current challenges as well as provoke us to think innovatively in our search for answers to these challenges. For these reasons, *Disrupting Class* is quite timely.

Clayton M. Christensen, the main author and professor at Harvard Business School, is the architect of the theories of disruptive innovation. Disruptive innovation is a framework which describes the process by which a product or service becomes established among non-consumers, initially in simple applications at the bottom of a market and then relentlessly moves 'up market', eventually displacing established competitors. Christensen first outlined his disruptive innovation theory in *The Innovator's Dilemma* (1997), which received the Global Business Book Award for the Best Business Book of the Year in 1997. He now focuses on disruptive innovation in education and health care. Michael Horn is the Executive Director, Education and co-founder of Innosight Institute, a non-profit think tank devoted to applying the theories of disruptive innovation to problems in the social sector. Curtis Johnson co-authored with Neal Peirce the 1993 book *Citistates: How*

*Urban America Can Prosper in a Competitive World*, and the 1997 book *Boundary Crossers: Community Leadership for a Global Age*, showcasing the top ten characteristics of places where citizens had made a measurable impact on public policy. Peirce and Johnson most recently authored *Century of the City* (2008), a book based on the major themes of a 2007 Global Urban Summit sponsored by The Rockefeller Foundation.

In the first chapter the authors examine the redefinition of intelligence. Christensen, Horn and Johnson reference Howard Gardner's on-going work on multiple intelligences. They argue that different students possess different types of intelligence, hence teaching methods that meet individual students at their strengths should be encouraged. Although they stress the need to teach to different types of intelligence in the classroom, the authors acknowledge that each teacher may have his or her own predominant type(s) of intelligence. The authors also recommend student-centered learning environments. However, they assert that the standardized interdependent nature of our schools does not support the level of customization needed to enable learners to reach their targeted levels of achievement. The authors enumerate four types of interdependencies, (a) temporal interdependence (progression from grade to grade), (b) lateral interdependence (how the teaching of one subject influences the teaching of another), (c) physical interdependence (arrangement of classrooms that discourage integration of content) and (d) hierarchical interdependence (local, state, federal and union mandates that are mostly contradictory).

In chapter two the historic analysis of the US educational system provided by the authors offers a context of changing public demands on the public school system. Their analysis in fact reveals the resilient nature of the system compared to known business models since the inception of the industrial revolution. The preamble to *Disrupting Class* is the failure of U.S. schools to improve in light of improving performance of students of other industrialized nations. As a consequence, high-tech jobs are predominantly being offered to Israelis, East Indians, and Chinese. The authors blame this trend on prosperity. In Japan, Singapore and Korea, increasing prosperity is blamed for the switch from extrinsic motivation among students to intrinsic motivation. With dwindling poverty, students in these three countries are now drawn to more enjoyable and perhaps relatively easier subjects in the humanities and social sciences. Despite this trend, Christensen, Horn and Johnson believe that the U.S. public school system has traditionally been able to weather the storm and live up to the public expectations as progressively higher performance levels have been demanded.

In chapters three and four, the authors present technology as the disruptive innovation that has the potential of providing the balance between standardization and customization. Technology is broadly defined as the processes by which an organization transforms inputs of labor, capital, materials, and information into products and services of greater value. The authors' recommendations include the use of software that adapts to individual student learning styles. Credit recovery, low-income urban schools, low-enrollment small schools, homebound and home-schooled should be targeted. Overall, the approaches outlined recognize the need for standardization of teaching and testing but at the same time recognize the incorporation of customization as the leverage to meet the current demand for improvement in student achievement.

In chapter five, the current public education system is described as a commercial system that is largely a value-chain business. In this system companies transform inputs at one end by adding value and delivering the higher-value products to customers at the other end. In comparing this model to two other business models, Christensen, Horn and Johnson claim that the ability of this value-chain model to deliver value is embedded in strong standardization. The value-chain model uses monolithic methods of instruction. The disruption of the value-chain education system towards a student-centered technology is a three-step process. The first step involves the complicated and expensive development of software that provides innovation in instruction. The second step involves the development of platforms that facilitate the creation of user-generated content. The next will be the emergence of a user network that can be compared to eBay, YouTube and dLife.

In chapter eight, the authors present a conceptual framework of how administrators can foster cooperation. Leadership, culture, power and management tools are presented. The framework provides a matrix for determining what tools are effective under what situations. These tools help school leaders to bring about effective change.

The authors provide insights about how standardization and customization may be collaboratively implemented. They consider that both are possible depending on the structure of the system and on the extent to which technology is used. Although the authors stressed the need to teach to different types of intelligence in the classroom, they acknowledged the difficulty associated with it due to each teacher's own predominant type of intelligence. This point was well made and resonated with me as a teacher. Nonetheless, I think the authors were right in suggesting student-centered approaches as a means for our schools to meet their current challenges.

However, I also think there was a missed opportunity in the book to explore the different perceptions of standards, and which ones inform the authors' use of standardization. The debate on education reforms should include what constitutes standardization in the context of the reforms. This is even more important if standardization and customization, easily viewed as dichotomous could be integrated.

## References

Christensen, C. M. (2000). *The innovator's dilemma: When new technologies cause great firms to fail*. New York: HarperBusiness.

Peirce, N. R., & Johnson, C. W. (1997). *Boundary crossers: Community leadership for a global age*. College Park, Md: Academy of Leadership Press.

Peirce, N. R., Johnson, C. W., & Peters, F. (2008). *Century of the city: No time to lose*. New York: Rockefeller Foundation.

Peirce, N. R., Johnson, C. W., & Hall, J. S. (1993). *Citistates: How urban America can prosper in a competitive world*. Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press.

**Reviewed by Cobina Adu Lartson is a science teacher and a doctoral candidate at the University of Colorado Denver.**

**Crowther, Frank; Ferguson, Margaret & Hann, Leonne. (2008). *Developing Teacher Leaders: How Teacher Leadership Enhances School Success*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.**

**Pages: 216 Price: \$33.95 ISBN: 978-1412963756**

This book provides a strong argument for the need for teacher leadership within a building to enhance the success of not only the students, but also the school at large. Crowther, Ferguson and Hahn reference the work of Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) that “within every school there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership, which can be a strong catalyst for making change” (p. 2). This metaphor emphasizes “the power [the giant] might exert if aroused” (p. 2). Teacher leadership in the past decade has begun to take on this power and gain more momentum as a way to effectively work for school change and student success. *Developing Teacher Leaders* is organized around three overarching topics: how teacher leadership has evolved (and how this edition differs from the first published in 2001), what teacher leadership looks like, and how to incorporate teacher leadership strategies within your school. Teacher leadership involves multiple facets, and within this book many are explored such as the Teachers as Leaders Framework, parallel leadership, new roles for principals and a host of activities to drive the development of teacher leadership around school improvement goals. Crowther, et al. ground their work in research and provide the practical application tools necessary for teachers and principals to begin their journey toward stronger teacher leadership and success within their building.

One of the guiding pieces in *Developing Teacher Leaders* is the Teachers as Leaders Framework. The framework synthesizes and explains the six effective traits teacher leaders possess. The framework states that teacher leaders exhibit qualities such as facilitating communities of learning, striving for pedagogical excellence, and translating ideas into sustainable systems of action (p. 3). Crowther, et al. have included case studies from a variety of school settings, ranging from elementary to high school, in which teachers at the building have established themselves as leaders and exhibited these six traits in their work toward student success and school improvement. These case studies not only serve to support the framework, but also provide the reader with a real-life portrait of what this research looks like in the life of the school.

One of the most important concepts the authors introduce is parallel leadership. Parallel leadership moves away from the top-down view of school leadership to require teachers and the principal to engage in mutual trust, shared purpose, and allowance for individual expression (pp. 54-56). Parallel leadership is designed to be reciprocal, respectful and empowering for all involved members. “[Parallelism] suggests respect, harmony, direction, alignment, individual presence, and complementarity” (p. 58). With successful parallel leadership in place, Crowther, et al show that teachers and principals can effectively engage in ongoing joint inquiry, culture-building, visioning activities, and schoolwide pedagogical development to enhance the success of their school (pp. 60-62).

With this change in philosophy from top-down management styles to training teachers for leadership positions within a school, the authors recognize the need to rethink the role of school principals. They name this new role “metastrategic principalship” and define this role to include envisioning inspiring futures, aligning key instructional elements, enabling teacher leadership, building synergistic alliances, and culture-building and identity generation (p. 71). Crowther, et al. repeatedly point out that teacher leadership is not a self-sustaining entity and that the principal “is the key vehicle in advancing the cause of teacher leadership” (p. 77). Because of this, all members must be on board with this new way of thinking; otherwise, the framework of teacher leaders goes unsupported and eventually loses momentum.

Crowther, et al. end *Developing Teacher Leaders* with the hands-on application of his work using the Creating Leaders to Accelerate School Success (CLASS) Plan. This plan identifies fifteen activities to develop, identify, and strengthen teacher leadership within a school. Crowther, et al. have engaged in these activities with teachers, principals and schools around the globe. The CLASS Plan uses a range of whole staff, small group, and individual reflection activities to investigate backgrounds, create shared visioning, recognize leadership traits, acknowledge barriers, create metaphors, and invigorate staff meetings. Each activity is spelled out clearly so any member of the group can visibly see the purpose, rationale, time consideration and necessary materials, and process. Many activities come with a reflection sheet and some with an individual journal prompt to continue to balance the whole group and individual inquiry model. The final activity can be revisited at every sixth month landmark along the teacher leadership journey. This way, the development of teacher leaders is never complete and remains a fluid process with new teachers emerging as leaders throughout many points in the school improvement process.

As a teacher leader within my school and an advocate for collaboration and teacher leadership in my local association, I found many of the CLASS Plan activities engaging, reflective and purposefully directed at developing current leaders and eliciting new leaders from the group around a common goal. Purposeful collaboration among teachers and between teachers and principal are necessary to create positive school change. Because of this, *Developing Teacher Leaders* is a practical and pertinent addition to the teacher and principal development library.

#### **References**

Katzenmeyer, M., & Moller, G. (1996). *Awakening the sleeping giant: Leadership development for teachers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

**Reviewed by Stephanie Van Horn, a doctoral student at University of Colorado Denver.**

**Orellana, Anymir; Hudgins, Terry L.; & Simonson, Michael. [Eds.]. (2009). *The Perfect Online Course: Best Practices for Designing and Teaching*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.**

**Pages: 576 Price: \$45.99 ISBN: 978-1-60752-120-4**

Can faculty and instructional designers create and teach a perfect course? *The Perfect Online Course* assumes that this feat is possible, and brings together literature that covers various aspects of online teaching and learning. The title suggests a book that will provide useful advice for instructors and designers, but those suggestions are hidden within the individual academic articles of which the book is comprised. These previously published articles—literature reviews, theoretical pieces, and research studies—are arranged into four sections; each section's articles are loosely connected by a central theme. A concluding essay written by one of the editors brings the various chapters and sections together.

Part I includes two introductory chapters that argue for effective instructional design. The first chapter recommends one approach, and the second describes a study that evaluated the effectiveness of various delivery methods. "Part II: Best Guidelines and Standards" includes reviews of literature and current studies that examine various design elements from both student and instructor perspectives. The section's final chapter, a framework for instruction design, is particularly useful as it grounds its framework in learning theories, instructional design models, and instructional theory. The final product is a clear set of guidelines for designing effective online courses. "Part III: Best Instructional Methods and Models" includes some chapters that use previous literature to propose models, as well as some that describe studies of current models. There are a variety of models that focus on the role of the instructor, the student, the designer, and the course content. "Part IV: Best Engagement Strategies" was, for this reader, the most useful. As an instructor of online courses, I am always looking for ways to ensure that my students are engaged with the content, the instructor, and each other. The research studies and frameworks presented in several of this section's chapters were informative. The book's short concluding essay describes a typical online course's structure, content, and "artifacts of learning." The author then concludes that perfection is a "pipe dream," and that "effectiveness" is what we should be aiming for.

*The Perfect Online Course* benefits from its inclusion of strong research. The book includes articles that are written by reputable scholars and drawn from prominent journals in distance education. The overall structure of the book—its organizing sections—is strong and guides the reader to the information being sought. Most of the sections include one chapter that provides clear guidelines for instructors or designers, in addition to the ideas that are presented in the conclusions of the individual research studies.

Unfortunately, the book fails on several points. According to the back cover, the book is intended "to make a contribution to the existing body of literature," but it consists entirely of existing literature. The book's premise is, by one of the editor's own admission, unattainable, although the subtitle, *Best Practices for Designing and Teaching*, is more accurate. The organization within sections is not always clear; the individual chapters are not connected except by the overarching section theme. Although there were several chapters that provided direct and concise advice, most were geared toward academics rather than practitioners.

In its entirety, the book is a useful resource for that brings together somewhat disparate research into a single volume. Parts of this book will be useful to a variety of audiences—instructional designers, instructors (especially those who are new to online learning or who are designing new courses), and academics studying distance education. The book will familiarize designers and instructors with the perspectives of the various participants in the online learning process. This awareness may help the partners work together to better create an effective online learning experience, if not the perfect online course.

**Reviewed by Ronald P. Kos, Jr., Assistant Professor, Music Education Department, School of Music, Boston University. His teaching responsibilities include courses in an online graduate degree program. His research examines education reform policy implementation and public school music programs.**

**Rovai, Alfred P.; Ponton, Michael K. & Baker, Jason D. (2008). *Distance Learning in Higher Education: A Programmatic Approach to Planning, Design, Instruction, Evaluation, and Accreditation*. New York: Teachers College Press.**

**Pages: 224 Price: \$49.00 ISBN: 0807748781**

Numerous definitions for distance education have been proposed; most include the separation of teacher and learner, the influence of an educational organization, the use of media to unite teacher and learner, the opportunity for two-way communication, and the practice of individual learning.

Distance education, when defined as an educational transaction between a teacher at one geographic location and a student at another – dates back to nineteenth century correspondence courses (Holmberg, 1986; Watkins, 1991). This distance education model used the mail to provide learners with educational opportunities that were otherwise unavailable. Initially, there were four main components of the instructional system: the student, the teacher, the instructional material, and the communications/delivery system (Dewal, 1988; Keegan, 1990). The earliest courses were offered directly by the instructor, but by the late nineteenth century some courses were provided under the auspices of sponsoring institutions (Garrison, 1989; Holmberg, 1989). Teachers designed courses, selected or developed instructional materials and forwarded readings, assignments, and tests to students. Students pursued their studies independently and submitted completed assignments to the instructor. Feedback was provided to the student as the teacher graded and returned assignments and tests. Student-teacher interactions were limited to written correspondence.

Recently, the world has seen a veritable explosion in the integration of computer-mediated communication and the Internet in education, resulting not only in the creation of new opportunities within the traditional classroom but in the expansion of learning experiences beyond the popular notion of "classroom" (Wegner, Holloway, & Garton, 1999). New educational technologies hold promise in connecting the academic world through improved and more accessible communication channels. The Internet and the World Wide Web manifest great potential in facilitating the growth of global classrooms through online connectivity. The enormous and rapid growth of distance education and enrollments in Web-based courses has generated interest in defining quality for online learning. Whether online learning becomes the norm in education or remains an auxiliary to existing approaches is a matter that only time will resolve. In the meantime, a number of groups (federal government or state governments, accrediting associations and students) are deeply interested in understanding how to ensure that course work or degree programs using this technology are of high quality. All stress the need to have a better understanding of what contributes to quality in online learning (Meyer, 2002).

There is plenty of research available in today's literature investigating issues related to distance education at the course level with the focus on designing and delivering effective online courses and activities. However, in their latest title *Distance Learning in Higher Education*, Alfred P. Rovai, Michael K. Ponton, and Jason D. Baker thoroughly take it to the next unique level and investigate characteristics of distance education at college and university levels by examining issues directly related to designing and delivering effective online degree programs.

This book provides a complete guideline on providing a programmatic approach to planning, designing, instruction, evaluation and accreditation by taking a look at recent distance education research and goes beyond course design and online instruction by addressing programmatic issues.

The organization of the book is well thought and chapters are separated along with the issues related to distance education. The book is divided into 11 chapters. In the first three chapters, authors provide an overview of theoretical foundations of distance learning, and touch on gender and culture issues in distance learning by providing the challenges and strategies that respond to these challenges. The second part of the book focuses directly on strategic planning, program and course design, assessment and students learning and online discussions. In the next section, the authors shift to program evaluation, institutional and program accreditation, and course evaluation. The book ends with a comprehensive summary of the issues provided in the book. In addition, the authors provide appendices including examples of distance education strategic plan, analytic participation rubric and evidence of quality distance learning programs.

*Distance Learning in Higher Education* is probably one of the comprehensive texts that deal directly with distance education at the program level. The content of the book provides a marvelous blend of theory and practice and covers every aspect of designing and implementing successful online education programs. The book serves as a wonderful guide for administrators, faculty, or staff personnel looking to succeed in the increasingly important but competitive market of delivering distance learning in higher education. It provides information about the essential components needed to design, deliver, and evaluate an effective online degree program.

*Distance Learning in Higher Education* is well written, clearly explained, and relevant to all those who are interested in best practices in distance education at the program level. The book emphasizes that distance education requires considerable pre-planning in order to be effective, and when designed and delivered correctly, it allows the programs to move beyond the simple delivery of content to the guiding of the learning process. It is comprehensive and it provides the visuals. It fills the need for a research-based book about the best practices in distance education at the program level. The book is unique in presenting planning, designing, and evaluating distance learning programs all in one making it an excellent text and practical resource. If you are involved in distance education at the program level as an administrator, faculty advisor or an instructor, I would strongly recommend this book as a reference for successful implementation.

One recommendation I would make for improving this book is to suggest that in the next edition the authors add chapters that focuses more on various technologies used for delivering distance education programs. In the current edition, book covers these technologies very broadly (LMS, Blogs, Wikis etc) in a couple of pages. However what might be helpful is a thorough analysis and comparison of each tool and maybe a worksheet that lists the criteria an institution should follow when selecting the technologies that best suit the teaching and learning process under consideration.

## References

- Dewall, O. S. (1988). Pedagogical issues in distance education. *Prospects*, 18, 63-73.
- Garrison, D. R. (1989). *Understanding distance education: A framework for the future*. London: Routledge
- Holmberg, B. (1986). *Growth and structure of distance education*. London: Croon Helm.
- Holmberg, B. (1989). *Theory and practice of distance education*. London: Croon Helm.
- Keegan, D. (1990). *Foundations of distance education*. London: Roudledge.
- Meyer, K. A. (2002). *Quality in Distance Learning*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports v. 29 no4. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Watkins, B. L. (1991). A quite radical idea: The invention and elaboration of collegiate correspondence study. In B. L. Watkins & S. J. Wright (Eds.), *The foundations of American distance education* (pp. 1-35). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- Wegner, S. B., Holloway, K. C., and Garton, E. M. (1999). The effects of Internet-based instruction on student learning. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 3(2), 98-105.

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

---

**Schreck, Mary Kim. (2009). *Transformers: Creative Teachers for the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Sage.**

**Pages: 216 Price: \$33.95 ISBN: 9781412971126**

In *Transformers: Creative Teacher for the 21st Century*, Mary Kim Schreck draws upon her lengthy career as a teacher and educational consultant for evidence of the power of creative teaching in 21st century classrooms. She describes how creativity in the classroom can be artsy fluff (the "crayola curriculum"), but can also be the application of principles gleaned both from experience and brain research on memory and motivation. She continuously walks a fine line between providing suggestions that are general enough to apply to a wide range of grades and content areas, and providing suggestions that are too generic to truly spark creativity. Based on the title, I thought the book would be full of inspiring stories about teachers who transformed students' lives with creative methods. Instead, I found that many of her examples and suggestions were already familiar to me (using molding clay as a metaphor for the writing process, using mind or concept maps, etc.). *Transformers* is not an index of creative hints and tips. It functions as a conduit, providing the theory and outlining the basic thought processes that will allow a teacher or teacher team to begin to activate their latent creativity.

Several chapters have specific relevance to teaching in 21st century public schools. Schreck briefly addresses how the current trend towards prescriptive pacing, curricula and a one-size-fits-all instructional mentality impacts the freedom to be creative in the classroom. She includes a chapter on using technology in creative teaching, which seems to have been written with technology-phobic teachers in mind. The chapter opens with long explanations of all the obvious ways technology can increase student creativity (students already like to use computers, ideas can be instantly shared). It closes with a list of steps for teachers to learn how to use technology, which includes such advice as learning about it in a safe community, and pacing yourself so you do not become overwhelmed. Here the suggestions may seem obvious and incremental, but serve as a safe starting point for those who may feel intimidated by technology or "stuck" in an uncreative routine.

The strength of the book is its structure. It has a painstakingly crafted definition of creativity, extensive rationale for its use, sets of examples, reasons and solutions for a lack of creativity in classrooms, and it explores current trends and issues in schools that jeopardize the creativity we need. Each chapter is followed by a "Your Turn" box with activities for the reader to complete as an individual or as a teacher team. Many of the activities involve responding to a prompt or making a note to yourself in a journal. Since Schreck's examples and suggestions are common and exceedingly basic, the "Your Turn" sections encourage readers to do the mental heavy lifting by generating relevant examples and coaching themselves through a creative process based on the theories and examples she describes. This is an effective way to generate situationally specific examples, but it requires a lot of the reader.

Schreck notes that colleges ask people recommending prospective students to rate them based on "creative, original thought; motivation; and independence, initiative" (p. 77) though these are not explicitly taught or even often encouraged in schools. She reports that national surveys of employers say, "eighty-five percent of employers concerned with hiring creative people say they can't find the applicants they seek...while 97 percent of employers say creativity is of increasing importance" (p. 185). These serve as her rationale for writing a book about creativity. Besides preparing students for college acceptance and the work place, however, I expected Schreck to explain the ways in which a creative teacher transforms their students. What exactly is transformed? What outcomes are possible that would not have been otherwise? I wanted to know more about the results and the vision of "unstuck" teaching and learning.

Based on her assertions, readers assume that the presence of creativity is preferable to its absence in a classroom. I was still left wanting a more vivid picture of the transformative power of a school experience infused with creativity. I wanted to hear more about the freedom, confidence, depth of thought and breadth of ability teachers give themselves, and their students when they dare to work creatively. Perhaps there is space for that in another book. As it is, this book serves as a solid foundational tool for teachers beginning to pry open the gates of creative thinking, and those struggling against mandates, routines, inertia, and the ever-changing classroom environment to keep them open. If, as Schreck says, taking a step in a creative direction will get the ball rolling for the long run, this book provides a solid foundation of theory and practice from which to begin. As a reference text for teachers who are "stuck" or intimidated by the idea of "thinking outside of the box," this book may very well be irreplaceable.

Reviewed by Rachael Gabriel, Doctoral Student, Literacy Studies, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

---

**Spector, Cecile C. (2009). *Sounds Like Fun: Activities for Developing Phonological Awareness, Revised Edition*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.**

**Pages: 152 Price: \$29.95 ISBN: 978-1598570489**

Phonological awareness is related to the understanding of the structure of language and is an essential skill in learning to read. Sound structures can be manipulated through rhyming, segmenting, blending and syllable use. Research suggests that explicit instruction in phonological awareness helps students become better readers; moreover, different readers need various types and amounts of phonological awareness experiences (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Cecile Cyril Spector's *Sounds Like Fun: Activities for Developing Phonological Awareness, Revised Edition* provides facilitators with a variety of



ready-to-use activities designed to improve students' phonological awareness.

With over 35 years of experience in the field of speech pathology, Spector has written and spoken on the topic of phonological awareness extensively. *Sounds Like Fun* uses humor to keep students interested in words as they learn how to grasp language subtleties and nuances that are encountered in daily situations. This six-unit activity book, designed mainly for students in grades 3-12, is loaded with fun intervention activities that are based on jokes and riddles to enhance students' literacy skills.

*Sounds Like Fun* offers a variety of engaging word learning activities that are appropriate for individual or group interactions. The quick, simple activities are ideal for students who have reading or language related learning disabilities as well as those who are learning English as a second language. The suggested intervention activities are also beneficial for typically developing students who need to strengthen their phonological awareness and vocabulary skills.

To assist educational professionals in using the activities that are provided in *Sounds Like Fun* successfully, Spector includes summaries of relevant phonological awareness research, brief explanations of informal phonological awareness assessment tools, and helpful suggestions for presenting the intervention activities. Each unit consists of useful facilitator notes which are followed by warm-up activities and phonological humor activities.

Warm-up activities consisting of eight "Think it Through" tasks are provided orally to students to encourage them to make new words that fit given definitions. These activities help students improve their understanding of how phoneme changes affect word meanings. Warm-up activities are followed by review activities to reinforce additional phonological awareness skills. Students are also prompted to create riddles of their own to exchange with their classmates. After the warm-up activities have been completed, students are engaged in phonological humor activities.

Phonological humor activities consist of three jokes or riddles that include: (a) taking away a consonant sound; (b) changing a consonant sound; (c) changing a vowel sound; and (d) adding a consonant sound. The phonological humor activities are followed by a review and reflection task. Jokes that have more than one sound change are included in the challenge activities unit and the additional activities unit contains items that explore sound addition, deletion, or substitution. Activity pages can be duplicated for student distribution and each activity takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. A helpful answer key, consonant and vowel sound appendices, and references are also provided.

*Sounds Like Fun* uses kid-friendly humor as an effective learning tool and is filled with activities that explore and analyze words at the phoneme level. The easy-to-follow, practical content of this fun-filled activity book would be beneficial for special educator, general educator, and speech-language therapist use in individual as well as small or large group settings.

## References

Snow, C., Burns, M., & Griffin, P. (Eds.) (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

**Reviewed by Cheryl K. Snyder, a doctoral candidate and graduate teaching assistant in the Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas. Her areas of professional interest include emergent literacy development, inclusive strategies for young learners, and unified early childhood teacher education.**

**Stillings Candal, Cara. (Ed.). (2009). *Partnering for progress: Boston University, the Chelsea Public Schools, and Twenty Years of Urban Education Reform*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.**

**Pages: 131 Price: \$45.99 ISBN: 978-1-60752-122-8**

While it is clear that the relationship between Boston University and Chelsea Public Schools is - as the editor of this book asserts - "truly unique" (p. viii), the essays featured in *Partnership for Progress* fail to reveal any surprises when it comes to successful school reform. What the authors refer to as the key "lessons learned" as a result of the Partnership, such as the importance of accountability, the need for professional development for teachers, the effectiveness of shared decision making, etc., are all ideas that have been expounded upon more fully (and certainly more explicitly) in the work of other researchers (i.e., Murphy, 2005).

In addition, while one can assume by the book's title that the main focus of the essays is the exploration of the relationship between Boston University and Chelsea Public Schools, an emphasis on the importance of a "highly responsive" (p.xiv) and an inclusive "culture of collaboration" (p.56) among all stakeholders persists. However, when one considers that the authors in this volume all have intimate ties with Boston University, (whether as employees or outside researchers specifically invited by the Partnership to study Chelsea Public Schools), it is troubling that readers are left with no understanding of how parents, teachers, or community activists view this effort. As such, while several contributors are quite forthright about the shortcomings (no one goes so far as to call them failures) of the Partnership, the overall tone of this book is a self-congratulatory one. As such, a reader of this book should look upon the claims made by the authors with a somewhat skeptical eye.

But what is perhaps most troubling about *Partnering for Progress* is its view of school reform as simply a "management exercise" (p. 26), in which all problems can be solved if the affected "variables" (i.e., students, teachers, and administrators) are dealt with in a "savvy," "pragmatic," or "strategic" way (p. 107). While I completely agree that trying to reform a school using "conventional rules...borders on the oxymoronic" (p. 21), it is also misleading to equate "progress" with success, especially when the latter is measured only by a 17-item checklist.

## References

Murphy, J. (2005). *Connecting teacher leadership and school improvement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

**Reviewed by Karrin S. Lukacs, an Adjunct Professor at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia. Her research interests include school improvement, teacher education, and teacher change agency.**

**Whalen, Christina. (2009). *Real Life, Real Progress for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Strategies for Successful Generalization in Natural Environments*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.**

**Pages: 236 Price: \$29.95 ISBN: 978-1-55766-954-4**

The author of the forward to this book notes that "It seems as though people on the autism spectrum are born without a 'generalization gene'" (p. xv). Yet the ability to generalize is an important element of success in both life and learning. No matter what interventions are chosen for the autistic child, it is important that consideration be given to supporting an increased ability to generalize. In this book, Christina Whalen brings together information about how different interventions or treatment settings can incorporate generalization. The term "generalization" is often associated with Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), and ABA strategies are the primary focus of the book.

Book reviews should not, in general, list contents and contributors. In this case, however, listing some of the interventions and the contributors is important. Each chapter is authored by a well-known authority on a particular intervention or issue. Most of the names and interventions will be familiar to anyone familiar with autism studies. For example, Carol Gray wrote the chapter social stories. Andy Bondy and Lori Frost wrote a chapter on the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). Bryna Siegel and Anne Bernard wrote about the JumpStart Learning-to-Learn Model. Mary Jane Weis and Robert H. LaRue authored a chapter on discrete trial instruction. Whalen, Dominic W. Massaro, and Lauren Franke discuss generalization in computer-assisted interventions. This is an impressive line-up of authors, and the interventions addressed are among those most frequently used.

However, there are some potential concerns about the book. First, should it be an issue that most of the chapters rely on the original intervention developers/researchers for content? Should not someone less invested in the chosen interventions be involved? However, the fact that the original contributors of several important interventions view generalization as worthy of their time and attention probably points out how vitally important the topic is. It should be noted that the authors seem to make an honest attempt to present potential shortcomings or adaptations that might need to be made. For example, in the chapter about discrete trial instruction, the authors note that "... DTI is a teaching methodology that has limited generalization benefits," although they do go on to discuss strategies that will promote more effective generalized learning (p. 52). A second related concern might be the fact that many of the interventions discussed are fee-based. Although the reader might have hoped for a somewhat broader scope, the interventions included are clearly among those that practitioners will be most familiar with and are reasonable choices. The book does not come across as an attempt to promote particular products. Although it is the job of the reviewer to point out such potential conflicts of interest, in the case of this book, the concerns are probably unwarranted.

A third consideration might be whether this book presents new content, or whether it is primarily a distillation of previous writings with a few paragraphs about generalization added at the end of each chapter. Although the authors reasonably describe the interventions, the focus is clearly to relate the treatment to generalization. All of the contributors expand upon their previous writings to address how to incorporate or focus upon generalization skills, and there is without question new information presented. In the final analysis, it is the stature of the contributors and the popularity of the interventions that contribute to the potential value and influence of the book. The list of contributors alone will probably be enough to attract a wide audience.

The intended audience is primarily the professional educator. Each chapter includes a fairly extensive list of references and several include appendices which give examples of activities, worksheets, checklists, instructional plans, and forms. Most of the chapters mention limitations of current research and make suggestions for future study. Although the advertising for the book emphasizes the hands-on, practical aspects of the book, it is notable for including both a focus on research as well as an emphasis on application. It should prove an important addition for collections that support autism programs.

**Reviewed by Sharon Naylor, Illinois State University**



~ ER home | *Reseñas Educativas* | *Resenhas Educativas* ~

~ overview | reviews | editors | submit | guidelines | announcements | search ~