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Brief reviews for May 2009

**Bellanca, James. (2008). *Designing Professional Development for Change: A Guide to Improving Classroom Instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Sage.****Pages: 128 Price: \$22.95 ISBN: 10-1412965462**

James Bellanca's *Designing Professional Development For Change: A Guide for Improving Classroom Instruction*, is neither a guide for improving classroom instruction, nor a guide for designing professional development that promotes change. The central argument of the text is an important one amid the current focus on teacher effectiveness. Bellanca argues that the goal of professional development (PD) should be the transfer of learning into the classroom, and that there are specific ways to design PD, which will facilitate such transfer. In fact, the most useful two pages of the book have diagrams illustrating levels of transfer (figure 4.1, p. 38) and the process of transfer (figure 4.2, p. 39). Both diagrams are borrowed from previously published texts (Bellanca & Fogarty, 2003; Fogarty, Perkins & Barell, 1992) and provide guidance about what professional developers should expect and provide at different stages and levels of transfer. The cleverness and utility of these two graphics are unmatched anywhere else in this short volume.

President Obama has consistently highlighted the growing urgency of discussions teacher professional development by saying again and again that 21st century teachers need more support in order to be help more accountable for student achievement. Bellanca revived his 1995 text on professional development (PD) to offer his old thoughts on this newly hot topic. Unfortunately, among many other gaffes, most of the research cited in this text has not been updated since the 1995 edition despite profound contributions to the field of staff development over the last thirteen years. In a chapter devoted to "best practices for transfer," Bellanca cites research on peer coaching, cognitive coaching, meta-cognitive mediation and shepherding, all completed prior to 1988. He adds two- or three-sentence sections on more current practices, including peer investigation, action research, and project-based learning, but does not cite sources or elaborate on the extensive current research base that accompanies them.

Besides ignoring recent research, Bellanca also has a tendency to call for action, but leave his reader wondering how to carry out such action. For example, Bellanca writes an entire chapter on ways to assess the depths of a student's negative beliefs, but writes nothing about what to do about these beliefs once their depth is assessed. He ends the chapter: "By recording the responses or having students journal responses the teacher obtains important data for assessing the depth of beliefs." Here, as in so many places throughout this book, the reader is left wondering "so what do you suggest we do?" Bellanca ends Chapter Three announcing that professional developers must "lead the charge" for change in classrooms that are increasingly controlled by scripts and mandates that even some principals do not have the authority to change. He fails, however, to describe how a professional developer might accomplish this.

My biggest concern about this book lies in the anecdotes and suggestions about classroom practice. Here Bellanca displays a frightening philosophy of teaching and learning that blames "cognitive deficiencies" among students for low-performance or plateaus in progress. Though he is careful to note that such deficiencies can be corrected with instruction, he also carefully skirts descriptions of such instruction. His solution at every stage of every scenario is to assess, assess, and then, assess some more, as if assessment both diagnoses and solves difficulties. For example, in a chapter entitled "Getting to the Heart of the Matter," there is an anecdote, which contains a principal's response to a teacher's concerns about a student who has strong oral reading fluency, but low comprehension despite the teacher's efforts with graphic organizers. Bellanca advocates graphic organizers for teachers as cutting edge examples of "best cognitive practices" (p. 62). Apparently, in this case the heart of the matter is a "cognitive deficiency" and somehow just knowing that (assess, assess, assess) solves it.

In this scenario, the principal says: "It looks to me like you haven't yet found the heart of the matter. I think she might need work on her thinking." I have no idea what it means to need work on one's thinking, so I read on. The quote ends: "Let's see where the cognitive deficiencies are and what we can do to help her get off this plateau" (p.18). My fear is that teachers and

principals will read this book and then set about diagnosing cognitive deficiencies instead of taking concrete steps to improve their practice. When students struggle with comprehension, there is nothing wrong with their brains, there seems instead to be a mismatch in the instruction they need versus the instruction they are receiving; either in kind or amount (Allington, 2009). Assessment is not a solution in and of itself, especially when the diagnosis is a "cognitive deficiency." I assume that people who pick up this book are looking for guidance for improving practice and increasing teacher effectiveness. They will unfortunately be both misled and disappointed.

I realize as a former reading teacher I have some background knowledge about reading comprehension that this principal would not have, and know for certain that I have a lot that Bellanca does not have. Bellanca airs his ignorance of reading research and best practices frequently throughout the book. One obvious example is his explanation of how teachers may need support and freedom to transfer what they learn into their classrooms: "If they are going to revise reading instruction to make use of comparing and hypothesizing—two of the high-impact strategies that may influence achievement- they will have to curtail other less effective strategies such as sustained silent reading (SSR) or choral reading" (p. 43). Nevermind that there are ongoing debates about the relative effectiveness of both strategies, with the nations top researchers in fluency and engagement staunchly advocating for both SSR and choral reading (Fisher, 2004; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Rasinski et al., 2008; Kuhn, 2004). What bothers me is that there is no citation or explanation for why he has dubbed "comparing and hypothesizing," high-impact strategies.

Because Bellanca spews simplistic, unsupported generalizations about teaching and learning, his readers will finish reading this book with dangerous misconceptions. They will finish with the idea that behaviorist approaches are pure evil, and constructivism is the only way to learn. They will finish with the idea that SSR should be categorically eliminated, (despite compelling research to the contrary) and replaced by some strategy I've never heard of called "hypothesizing." [Could he be referring to the active reading strategies of predicting and inferring (Duke & Pearson, 2002)?] Readers will finish the book thinking low-performing students perform badly because there's something fundamentally wrong with how they think, and that assessment is all it will take to fix it. They finish thinking it's a professional developer's job to lead the way for changes even a principal cannot make room for, but they will not have the slightest idea how this ought to happen. In short, they will finish with misinformation, misdirection and confusion.

The stage of American education is now set for a revolution in staff development and teacher education because the nation's eyes and hopes are now trained specifically on teacher effectiveness. This book therefore could have been an opportunity for Bellanca to substantively critique the "sit 'n git" methods of one-size-fits-all professional development that has monopolized the field for so long. It could have been an opportunity to add to current research and understanding of what Hawley and Valli (1999) and Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) refer to as the "new paradigm" of PD, in which teachers are actively engaged in ongoing inquiry. It could have been a chance to share the research and rationale behind so-called "best-practices," while highlighting the idea that no one way works or fails for every teacher in every school: a message that is more and more imperative in this age of increasing federal control of education. Unfortunately, Bellanca did not take advantage of such opportunities, and has thus left us with a book of questionable accuracy, theory and utility.

As I wrote this review, my copy of *Designing Professional Development for Change* was recalled by another patron of my university's library. I considered not returning it, or returning it with a note of caution not to pay attention to the ideas about struggling learners or best practices. I also considered marking pages 38-39 and taping the rest of the book shut. Being a respectful library patron and supporter of freedom of press, I obviously did neither. I do hope, however, that the next reader will have enough background knowledge about teaching and learning not to let Bellanca's explanations cause any harm to teachers or students. In this critical time for serious work on teacher PD, I also hope that the next reader follows me in not recommending this book to their friends.

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

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**Bowen, Julie; Ashcraft, Paula; Jenson, William R. & Rhode, Ginger. (2008). *The Tough Kid Bully Blockers Book: 15-Minute Lessons for Preventing and Reducing Bullying*. Eugene, OR: Pacific Northwest Publishing.**

**Pages: 276 Price: \$60.00 ISBN: 978-1-59909-019-1**

Classroom teachers know that there is a lot more that goes into teaching than just the academics. One of the biggest challenges can be bullying. This can have a lasting impact not only on the academic future of a student but also with their mental growth and maturity. It is essential that schools today address this problem in a direct manner. Julie Bowen, Paula Ashcraft, William Jenson, and Ginger Rhode have produced a manual titled *The Tough Kid Bully Blockers Book* that covers this very topic. Designed for grades 1-6, this book provides background, lessons, and strategies for working with what the authors refer to as the "Tough Kids." These are the students who will not respond to a simple time-out or sentence writing. The program is designed for school-wide implementation.

*The Tough Kid Bully Blockers Book* is divided into 6 sections. Section 1 gives a brief overview of the organization of the book. Section 2 describes bully behaviors and identifies what schools as a whole need to have in place before a program like this can be successful. Section 3 is comprised of research about bullying. Section 4 discusses how the actual program can be set up in the school, classroom, or small group. Section 5 discusses specific strategies that can be used for bullies and for supporting victims. Section 6 consists of the actual lessons for teaching what the authors call the six major anti-bullying skills: basic bullying, tools, friendship builders, problem solvers, respecting differences, and confidence boosters. The clear sections in this book make it easily accessible to both a teacher looking for a specific lesson and for a principal or superintendent looking for a school-wide behavior system.

As a current classroom teacher, I found this book to be refreshing and helpful. My experience with anti-bullying books is that they offer basic lessons that will not change the really difficult kids. This book does not offer simple lessons with a coloring page at the end. It offers major strategies and school-wide approaches that will reach the students who need it the most. This manual is designed to reach the toughest students which the authors found to be about seven percent of the student population. When these students are reached, then the vast majority of a school's problems will come to an end. It is these students that this book will help schools to reach. Another positive is that the authors recognize the need for a school-wide program. As a classroom teacher, I often deal with bullying. However, it rarely happens in the classroom. It is almost always on the playground, in the lunchroom, or in the bathroom. That is why the whole school must be on the same program.

The strategies offered in *The Tough Kid Bully Blockers Book* are both easy to implement and creative. An example is the structured recess strategy. This is a five day approach in which the student learns to stop a negative behavior. On day one they are simply separated during recess or lunch. On day two they are given an assignment, most likely writing or drawing, involving the bullying action. On day three, the student is taught an actual lesson on the bullying behavior and is involved in role-playing solutions. On day four, the student is allowed to return to recess where they are closely watched and encouraged by a staff member. On day five, the student continues at recess at an independent level. This example should display three key concepts from the book. One, these strategies are for the really tough kids and would be implemented with a student who is continuously displaying negative bullying behaviors. Two, this is a school-wide approach. Many staff members would be involved in this strategy, not just the classroom teacher. Three, these students need to be directly taught these lessons and encouraged in the process.

The manual also offers specific lessons. These can be completed individually, in a small group, in a classroom, or even as an assembly. They are quick, effective learning strategies that are intended to be completed in fifteen minutes or less. An example is the teasing blocker. The teacher gives background to teasing and the students role-play examples. The teacher then supplies the students with strategies they can use when this happens. For example the student can ignore by visualizing a special place, thinking positive thoughts about themselves, or using a relaxation method of tensing and releasing. They are all quick, practical activities that involve the students.

*The Tough Kid Bully Blockers Book* offers strategies and lessons that would benefit any school. Unfortunately, there are many schools that fail to have a system such as this. This will not only hinder our students' emotional health, but it will ultimately hurt academics as well. Readers of this manual will instantly see the usefulness a plan like this will have in an elementary school. Too often, schools are relying on only the classroom teacher or the principal to hand out discipline as they see fit. However, just as there are set expectations and plans for academic success, there also needs to be the same kind of thought going to positive behavior. *The Tough Kid Bully Blockers Book* allows such a program to occur.

Reviewed by Aaron Lentner, M.A., Azusa Pacific University, and elementary school teacher in Colorado Springs District 11. His interests include classroom management and moral education.

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**Pages: 232   Price: \$39.95   ISBN: 978-1-85539-460-5**

I was interested in the title of Catherine Corrie's book when I first read it. However, I had no idea that *Becoming Emotionally Intelligent* was to quickly become one of my favorites this year. The topic of emotional intelligence has frequently appeared in the literature, but most articles and books have not been written with the same twist that Corrie uses. She does a good job of connecting the material on emotional intelligence to brain function, facilitates the reader's understanding of how to better control emotions, and helps us to recognize why some of the emotions surface in the first place.

Each of the 16 chapters offers valuable insight into what emotional intelligence is and what it looks like in the behaviors of children and teachers in classrooms as well as those who are not connected to classrooms. We are guided toward awareness of our emotions and perhaps more importantly toward understanding how to master our emotions as we react to our environment. Though the book does not present a body of research studies per se, the author is successful in furnishing us with information that reflects the benefits of emotional intelligence, e.g. health, satisfaction with life, positive relationships, and academic success.

In her foreward, the author brings to your attention a three-step process that helps us make emotionally intelligent decisions. I found myself flipping back to this section to remember the steps. I later came to recognize these as tenets of success. In abbreviated form, the steps help you clarify and adjust your reaction to experiences through cycles of: know yourself, choose yourself, and give yourself. Change begins within us, through our own awareness and learning. Therefore, we need to know ourselves before we try to understand the behavior of others.

Emotional intelligence is described as both simple and deep. The meaning of this sentence came to life as I found myself thinking this process is easy; but, if it is easy, why is it so difficult to control.

Chapter One, the introduction to the book, begins with a scenario of a student who has intolerable behavior. Corrie discusses how, as a teacher, she worked with his behavior, how the student gained control over much of his behavior, and how his classmates' behavior also changed. She called it a transformation. Once you read about Andrew and his behavior, you will most likely agree with the term. The author embellishes the scenario with specific knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes she used to help the student. These are helpful points, as they become a checklist for action. She comments that children learn from you how you are being in addition to what you are saying--something I have found to be true in my own teaching experience.

The book is more appealing because of the stories about classroom behaviors she has encountered. She guides the reader to understand how taking time to develop emotional intelligence helps with motivation, empathy, and accountability; and, she introduces the concept of emotional wisdom, which can help us choose and become who we will be rather than being molded by fear or threat.

Chapter Two addresses the internal and external environment. The chapter starts with a powerful poem. Reading it makes you stop and think about the content of the chapter, before you begin reading. There are pertinent quotations and sayings throughout the book to drive home important points and take your thinking to clearer, poetic, or theoretical levels. The content of this particular chapter helps clarify the definitions of internal and external environments. One of the truly "jump out and grab you" statements of this chapter revealed that in a second, about 400 billion bits of information come in through our five senses and around 2000 bits get through to our consciousness. I found myself searching for a piece of paper to write down that number: 400,000,000,000. I was astounded to think that the number would be that large, and I could not begin to guess how someone could ever compute such a figure.

The hook for me was that Corrie interweaves detailed information about how the brain functions with what seems to be relatively simple strategies for fostering emotional development. Though I had studied about the roles of the amygdala and hippocampus, for the first time I really grasped how we form emotions and store them, and how our memory of emotion resurfaces. I was aware of my scanning for information as I read to make connections. Our early experiences create a history of emotion as we seek to connect with others and develop a sense of belonging. I was stunned when the author said that people who hurt others have a belief that they themselves don't matter. Of course this was true, but somehow seeing the point in print was almost like unveiling a secret message.

All of the chapters are rich with examples. Some of the chapter components seem to reach out from the page providing basics for helping children and others become more emotionally competent. One of the most outstanding statements came in Chapter Three when the author assures us that people find a way to communicate what their needs are and what others need to do to help them if someone is really listening. Emotional literacy reflects our ability to convey our needs to others in a way they are understood, and it includes setting boundaries and letting others know they matter. The text weaves a tapestry of understanding, explaining how hurt and anger can become twisted into revenge and a desire to hurt others, and assures us there is no wrong emotion, but rather a wrong reaction to emotion.

Subsequent chapters are relevant and intriguing as they address such topics as the limbic system, emotional memory, and specific emotions. Chapter Five introduces the Drama Triangle and clarifies how the roles of victim, persecutor, and rescuer unfold and are sustained or transformed. I could think back to specific life moments in and out of classrooms where the victim or other roles played out in predictable behaviors. The concept of leveller was most intriguing; if we are to escape from the destructive triangle, we must be able to convey how things are for us without blaming or being attacked. The

author's easy-to-follow approach enhances the readability of each chapter and the ease with which the concepts can be used to further develop emotional intelligence.

Chapter Six addresses the emotional effects of grief and loss. Another chapter addresses motivation and reminds the reader that there is a point at which stickers, stamps, and certificates are no longer good practice and actually weaken intrinsic motivation. Chapter Nine introduces the concept of spiritual intelligence and how it is intertwined with our beliefs and values, and Chapter 12 provides a deeper coverage of spirituality and spiritual intelligence.

Chapter 11 provides the reader with a lot of "ah-ha" moments that lead to reflection on personal life events. Seeing how pessimistic views can be made optimistic and cause us to view a situation or event with an entirely different "lens" of understanding and response holds value for learning effective strategies of emotional development. If we can change our view of a situation, we can also adjust the emotions connected to the situation and our reaction to the emotion.

The remaining chapters offer ideas that foster valuable insight and provide activities and examples to reinforce and extend learning. It is helpful to have these specific strategies presented. The "I" message strategies offer templates of thought and wording to help guide the way to emotional development and control.

Catherine Corrie's book, *Becoming Emotionally Intelligent*, introduces concepts, terminology, strategies, examples, and activities that will help teachers, students, and most anyone else, learn that emotional intelligence is a life journey and there are ways you can smooth the path for more optimum growth. This is an easy-to-read book that incorporates simple and complex concepts in a way that they are readily understood and can be used. Think about those 400 billion bits of information bombarding you every second. We can all use suggestions as to what we should attend to and how we can react in a more emotionally healthy way.

**Reviewed by Kathleen Fite, Professor of Education, Texas State University - San Marcos, Texas.**

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**Getz, Malcolm. (2007). *Investing in College: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.**

**Pages: 304 Price: \$15.95 ISBN: 9780674030466**

The decision to attend college is a huge investment of time, money, energy, and hopes for a bright, successful future. With the recent economic woes in the United States, interests in higher education are increasing and more and more people are facing tough questions of investment with regard to the aforementioned issues. Malcolm Getz, an economist at Vanderbilt University, is an expert in both higher education and economics. His array of knowledge provides a wealth of information for those contemplating questions about the costs of higher education, financing a college education, quality of education (both actual and perceived), returns on investment, etc.

As suggested by the title, the book is literally a guide for the perplexed. As opposed to simply making readers aware of issues one can expect to face when pondering a higher education investment, Getz provides concrete examples of dilemmas a typical student might face. These examples are often comparative in nature, which is helpful in conveying the message that each student should do some tedious and painstaking research before making any commitment. One example might evaluate which is a better investment, attending a premier institution or attending a less prestigious institution that happens to possess a nationally recognized program in a particular disciplinary area. In other instances, Getz encourages readers to understand the linkages between college and career, short-term versus long-term gains, the problems associated with various rankings, the admissions process, tuition disparities, and so on. Getz masterfully presents the argument that any investment decision will contain many layers, but understanding the importance and potential impact of each major factor that goes into the decision will result in a better investment.

The text is very well written and uses clear, practical language that the intended audience should easily understand. The text is interwoven with research findings and practical advice, a very valuable asset for those looking for direction and answers. Perhaps the most significant criticism of this text might include its limitation in scope. Although Getz acknowledges college investment decisions should be based upon a number of important variables, he uses only one framework (an economic perspective) to explore investment decisions. Although the purely economic perspective is important, the text might be better supported with other perspectives (such as social, religious, regional, etc.) as well. In the author's defense, such a broad and encompassing undertaking would be incredibly arduous and difficult to balance. Other criticisms of the text might include a slight focus on top-tier institutions and those with higher sticker prices. More attention to the qualitative differences among lower priced institutions would be very valuable for those who are not among the top of their high school classes and are not even considering many of the more well-known colleges and universities.

It is clear that Getz's aim was to provide a text that could serve as a useful tool for informing investment decisions as it relates to various higher education issues. Instead of simply presenting facts and results from various economic studies, Getz does a brilliant job of taking this one step further by interpreting these findings for readers and presenting advice in a very clear manner. Further, he does a wonderful job highlighting the importance of context when making investment decisions, as each student's situation will most likely be somewhat unique. This book will truly benefit anyone exploring college opportunities and concerned with associated costs, thus making it a must-read for anyone responsible for financing a higher education experience.

**Edwards, Patricia A. (2009). *Tapping the Potential of Parents: A Strategic Guide to Boosting Student Achievement through Family Involvement*. New York: Scholastic.**

**Pages: 96 Price: \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-545-07477-3**

Patricia Edwards' *Tapping the Potential of Parents: A Strategic Guide to Boosting Student Achievement through Family Involvement* lays out strategies for improving parental participation in schools. The simple format and concise presentation of Edwards' guide make it an accessible choice for realizing school change. The guide provides step-by-step instructions for evaluating parental involvement, communicating effectively with parents, and increasing the number of parents and the level of parental involvement within the school.

Edwards' chronological arrangement of steps necessary for achieving increased family participation include gathering information about parents and families, analyzing parent information, and communicating with and recruiting parents to participate. Companion charts and organization tools are provided for every suggestion making implementation straightforward. Further, the examples provided with each strategy indicate that the methods are school-tested and ready to use.

Some of Edwards' more unique ideas include creating a master homework and activity calendar at the beginning of the school year, creating professional-quality videos for parental communication purposes, and tapping social networks and community leaders to promote family involvement in schools. Finally, Edwards addresses the existing diversity among parents and families explaining the schools must recognize "differentiated parenting" and practice "parentally appropriate" expectations when encouraging parental involvement. Though Edwards states that *Tapping the Potential of Parents* is a resource for teachers or school administrators, full implementation of suggested proposals would require a school-wide effort; thus, it is probably best suited for school administrators.

**Reviewed by Maria Cahill, doctoral student in literacy education at the University of Tennessee.**

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**Hargis, Charles H. (2007). *English Syntax: An Outline for Teachers of English Language Learners. Third Edition*. Springfield, IL: C.C. Thomas.**

**Pages: 299 Price: \$69.95 ISBN: 978-0398077778**

*English Syntax*, written by academician Charles H. Hargis, makes a significant contribution to the field of second language acquisition (SLA) by exploring the components of the English language. The book is introduced by a preface, which lays out the background and the nature of the book, and consists of thirty eight chapters and two appendices. As an easy to use, practical guide on the procedures and methodology of linguistics, this book is a greatly needed resource that will benefit students as well as professionals in applied linguistics. The text alternates several times between instruction and exercises. Hargis provides us with a variety of teaching tips and plenty of drills to reinforce the language skills. Sometimes the exercises are confusing and answers are not always provided which make the lessons difficult to understand. The inclusion of some solutions to these exercises is very helpful. It is recommended that an appendix be added with some of the answers provided (e.g. even numbers). This will make it easier for the students to self-correct their mistakes.

The author's enthusiasm for the topic is obvious throughout the book. Additional activities on how to use the syntactic system in real life situations could help reduce the amount of material presented. This does not diminish the credibility of the drills nor the excellence of this book because clear explanations are provided with numerous supporting examples. The book follows a general pattern when introducing new structures: (a) a scope of the syntactic features, (b) a discussion of the structure or prescriptive rules, and (c) a series of examples and exercises (some of them follow by answers).

As mentioned before, the book is divided into thirty-eight chapters. Each chapter represents a part of the syntactic system in the English language. Chapter one is an introduction. Chapter two provides a general description of different sentences from more elementary sentences to more complex sentences. Chapters three and four focus on the auxiliary explaining the rules followed by examples and exercises with their solutions. The next three chapters examine the noun phrase. Chapters eight thru eleven examine the verb phrase. Chapters twelve to fourteen describe the different kinds of questions: yes/no and WH questions. Chapters fifteen thru thirty-four summarize the major clause types based on a functional classification. Furthermore, these chapters also give a valuable scope of the grammatical and semantic functions of the words such as lexical (e.g. verbs, adverbs, adjectives, etc) and functional words (e.g. conjunctions, prepositions, articles, etc). Chapter thirty-five identifies the purposes of language assessment and the different kind of format a teacher must follow when testing for instruction. The last three chapters discuss important methodological points, and lay out semantic restrictions such as comprehension and production considerations which may possibly lead to remedial procedures. Hargis also provides helpful hints for the regular teacher as well as the ESL teacher by pointing out syntactic methods. Content and teaching suggestions are found throughout the last few chapters.

Hargis' book differs from other books in that he uses rules in the form of formulas to conclude his discussions about the syntactic system. The book deals with concepts which are central to traditional grammar such as parts of speech, subordinate clauses, subjects and objects, etc. The book draws on topics which are central to the construction of texts and

are of major importance in learning English.

The book's purpose is to expand effective instruction of the English language. This is accomplished through providing basic background knowledge and awareness of the language, facilitating its understanding. This book will make lesson planning easier because it is easy to follow starting from the noun phrase and its components to the verb phrase and its components. The sentences used as part of the exercises are easy to follow and understand.

The book is carefully edited. I feel that Hargis has the ability to explain complicated ideas in a simple way, making certain that students understand the basics of English grammar through the application of a complex system.

**Reviewed by Cristina P. Valentino, ESOL Coordinator at Jacksonville University, Jacksonville, FL.**

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**Koepf, Maren. (2008). *Synchronizing Success: A Practical Guide to Creating a Comprehensive Literacy System*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.**

**Pages: 192 Price: \$18.00 ISBN: 978-1-57110-743-5**

In *Synchronizing Success*, literacy specialist Maren Koepf provides a detailed blueprint for creating a comprehensive literacy system based on her experiences at Moreland Hills Elementary. She draws upon the work of Fullan, DuFour, Marzano, Calkins, Keene, and Allington, combining "current theory about school reform with the strongholds of evidence-based literacy instruction" (p. 5) in a thought provoking, yet readable style. The author does a masterful job of describing the vision and transformation of the literacy system she orchestrated without ignoring the challenges associated with a change of this magnitude. Instead of finishing the book with a feeling of "that is great – but it wouldn't work at my school," the reader is empowered to initiate the change process with realism and optimism. Each chapter concludes with "Think Big, Start Small: Four Simple Steps Forward" a feature that helps the reader to identify a starting place for change.

The text is divided into two parts. In the first part, Koepf presents a framework that both grounds and guides the reform process. The goal of the framework is continuous improvement. At its heart is a cycle of revision that allows for continual refinement and the flexibility to adapt to changing needs. The existence of the framework, coupled with shared vision, allows the school to move away from well-intentioned, but disjointed initiatives, which Koepf calls "random acts of good intention," to a comprehensive plan in which all aspects of literacy are aligned, or "synchronized" to maximize effect. Ongoing improvement is shaped by three guiding principles: continuity by design, continuous professional development, and collaborative leadership. Each of these principles is discussed in detail with practical examples and suggestions.

The second section of the book looks at individual components of the plan, providing an in-depth look at the processes and resources used by Koepf. Chapters include discussions of professional development, assessments, instructional expectations, and interventions. Each topic is presented with a rationale, a description of the process, and numerous charts and tables that can be used or adapted. Chapters conclude with a section entitled "What Can Administrators and School Leaders Do?" This section offers practical suggestions, framed within the three guiding principles, that set the stage for fruitful discussions. A final feature guides readers in taking ownership of the plan by customizing it to fit their own specific needs.

The appendices to the volume provide readers with valuable resources that can be used and adapted to meet the needs of any school that seeks to undergo the type of systemic reform needed to really accomplish the critical work of literacy plan development. The charts that provide classroom accommodations for readers who are experiencing difficulty are of special note. Presented in a simple *if-then* format, the reader is provided with a variety of evidence-based strategies that can be implemented to accelerate progress for a wide range of literacy skills.

*Synchronizing Success* is a resource that belongs in the library of literacy leaders. Current reading specialists will find practical suggestions and encouragement to take those first "baby steps" toward change. Discussions surrounding this text in a faculty book study would be challenging and potentially transforming, regardless of the current state of literacy instruction in the school. It would be appropriate for use as a supplemental text in graduate courses for those preparing to take leadership roles in the schools.

**Reviewed by Karen J. Kindle, Assistant Professor of Literacy and Reading Education, University of Missouri-Kansas City.**

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**Lee, Allison. (2008). *Childminder's Guide to Child Development*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.**

**Pages: 114 Price: \$14.99 ISBN: 978-1847060853**

Many parents have to use childcare at some point. One of their options is to choose a childminder. Childminders look after children on domestic premises, most often in the childminder's own home or in the child's home. Whereas nannies also work in domestic premises (although most often in the family home), the advantage of childminders is that they are subject to formal registration requirements. In the United Kingdom, this registration is required for child care under the age of eight. The registration implies that checks are carried out to ensure the childminder's practices meet standards and that the



childminder is knowledgeable about child development and childcare.

One book that can help the childminder in gaining this knowledge on child development is Lee's *Childminder's Guide to Child Development*. This book gives an overview of different areas of child development including: personal, social, emotional, cognitive, creative, and physical development. In addition, attention is given to children's rights, working with disabled children, and working in partnership with parents. The book especially relates to the second unit of the UK diploma Home-based Child Care, "Childcare and Child Development (0-16) in the Home-Based Setting."

The book is very compact. Lee keeps her discussion of the topics short and provides little detailed explanations. Her book, therefore, is indeed to be used for people who already have some knowledge of children or unit 1 of the UK diploma, or outside the UK, some other theoretical course. What the book mainly does is increase the reader's awareness of what children are able to do, what they need and what the childminder's possibilities are. There are multiple exercises for the childminder to achieve this. For example: "Try putting a music CD on while the children are engrossed in play. What do the children do when the music plays?" These types of exercises can stimulate the childminder to be creative in fostering the development of all children under her/his care and to be sensitive to their individual differences.

From the introduction of the book, it becomes clear that the individual development of children is exactly what Lee tries to emphasize. This is beautifully phrased by her as: "It is paramount that practitioners....do not lose sight of how a child develops and grows as an individual" (p. ix). Lee also stresses that the child should be looked at as a whole person, and thus accounts for the different areas of development simultaneously. In other words, Lee encourages the childminder to look at children from a holistic perspective. I would recommend this book to people who want to become a registered childminder and already have a fair amount of knowledge on child development.

**Reviewed by Francine C. Jellesma, University of Amsterdam.**

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**Ma, Karin & Taylor, Nicole. (2009). *Differentiating Assessment in the Reading Workshop*. New York: Scholastic.**

**Pages: 144    Price: \$24.99    ISBN: 978-0-545-05397-6**

In the literacy education library, there are books *about* reading assessment and books *containing* reading assessments, but relatively rare is the book that gives practical advice to the classroom teacher on how to integrate the assessments they already use into a coordinated framework for teaching reading. Enter Karin Ma and Nicole Taylor's slim but highly practical *Differentiating Assessment in the Reading Workshop*, which boasts a rather cumbersome subtitle promising *Templates, Checklists, How-to's, & Student Samples to Streamline Ongoing Assessments So You Can Plan & Teach More Effectively*. While that might conjure visions of a loosely organized handbook of reproducibles and other teacher-created materials, what the reader gets is something that is not at all suggested by the title, but which is infinitely more useful: a tightly focused manual for creating and nurturing a standards-based, assessment-informed early literacy learning environment.

The genius of Ma and Taylor's book is that the authors--both practicing teachers--take these buzzwords that are all too often recited as abstract mantra and clearly demonstrate their practicality in real classrooms. Ever marvel at Debbie Miller's *Joy of Conferring* (2005) and feel like you could never do that in a "real" classroom? Ma and Taylor give readers a toolbox to make it happen, and their tool of tools is the reading conference. While the reading workshop framework recommended by the authors as a mechanism for affording maximum opportunities for one-on-one and small group conferring with developing readers is not a new innovation, they give the reader a solid foundation for building such a classroom with an accompanying CD-ROM that provides a generous collection of fully customizable forms for organizing conferences, tracking assessment results and measuring student progress against your own state's benchmarks. There are even tools for facilitating communications with parents, an often overlooked competency in the professional literature for literacy teachers.

What sets *Differentiating Assessment in the Reading Workshop* apart from other reading assessment books is both its modest aims and its ambitious practicality. Ma and Taylor do not peddle a whole new reading inventory or packaged assessment system; rather, they restore the Running Record to its proper place as a flexible, formative assessment, designed to support instructional decision-making and foster instructional conversations between teachers and students. The impressive array of forms included in the book and on the CD is not a complicated new tool for standardizing the reporting of aggregate assessment data, but rather an easily coordinated system for aligning standards, instructional tasks and assessments for individual learners. Think the Teaching-Learning Cycle sounds like a lot of good theory for someone else's utopian school? Karin Ma and Nicole Taylor's *Differentiating Assessment in the Reading Workshop* may empower you to think again.

## References

Miller, D. (2005). *The joy of conferring* [DVD]. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

**Reviewed by Dr. Sean Kottke, Chair, Binda School of Education, The Robert B. Miller College, Battle Creek, MI.**

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**Rasinski, Timothy V. (2008). *Daily Word Ladders*. New York: Scholastic.**



*Daily Word Ladders* provides first and second grade teachers with over 150 reproducible word study lessons. Through daily word ladders, students can learn decoding, spelling, phonics, and vocabulary skills. When completing these activities, students are required to take away or add letters to words, which causes them to closely analyze the sound-symbol relationships present in words. The clues given in the activities provide students the opportunity to read definitions which may assist in their vocabulary development. Emergent readers may also gain familiarity with terms such as first letter, last letter, and vowel.

An example from the book is entitled "Counting Up" (p. 32). The word *few* is at the bottom of the ladder. The clue instructs the student to write the word that means "tiny drops of water that form on grass at night". The page instructs the student to change the first letter, so the student would write *dew* on the line. The next rung of the ladder instructs the student to change the last letter and provides the clue "home to a fox or bear". The student would write *den* on that rung and move up to the next clue which reads "a group with a man and others like him". Change the first letter and the answer is *men*. Moving to the next rung on the ladder, the clue is "a boy grows up to be this" and the student is instructed to change the vowel. The student would write *man* and move up to the final rung of the ladder. The answer to the top rung of the ladder is always related to the bottom rung in some way. The given clue is the "opposite of few" and the student is instructed to add a letter to the end of the word. The student would write *many* to complete the ladder. *Few* and *many* are antonyms and are also related to the title of this reproducible activity, "Counting Up."

This book is filled with word ladders ranging from five to eight rungs. Since the format is the same, a teacher can use these activities throughout the year without having to waste time on giving new instructions each time. After a few experiences, students will recognize the format and know how to complete the activity. Blank word ladders with between five and eight blank rungs are also available in the back of the book so teachers can create their own activities based on their curriculum and own individual student needs. These activities are also excellent for differentiated instruction. First grade teachers can use the more difficult word ladders for their advanced students and second grade teachers can use the less difficult word ladders for their struggling students. The activities can also be extended by having students sort the words they wrote on the ladder rungs. Categories for sorts could include grammar (nouns, verbs), spelling patterns, word length, or word meaning.

Through completing daily word ladders, students can learn important literacy skills necessary for reading. These activities are engaging for students and effortless for teachers to implement. *Daily Word Ladders* can be used by individual students, students in pairs, or by groups of students. This flexibility allows teachers to use these activities as seatwork or at learning centers. *Daily Word Ladders* would be a great addition to any primary grade teacher's repertoire.

**Reviewed by Jennifer Jordan, a doctoral candidate in literacy studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Jennifer's interests include narrative and expository writing in primary grade classrooms, as well as the dialogue occurring between teachers and students in these classrooms.**

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**Wendling, Barbara J. & Mather, Nancy. (2009). *Essentials of Evidence-Based Academic Interventions*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.**

**Pages: 304 Price: \$36.95 ISBN: 978-0-470-20632-4**

Response to Intervention, a systematic method of providing additional evidence-based instruction to children experiencing difficulty learning (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan & Young, 2003), is continuing to gain attention in current school improvement efforts. Novice and experienced teachers need help identifying appropriate intervention strategies that can be implemented during classroom instruction in an effort to support all children's learning. *Essentials of Evidence-Based Academic Interventions* by Barbara Wendling and Nancy Mather is a practical reference guide consisting of instructional strategies that can be applied by teachers who work with children who are struggling in the basic skills areas of reading, writing, and mathematics.

The authors, both experienced in assessment and intervention development, provide clear descriptions of research-based academic interventions that can be utilized in general and special education classrooms. Concise, easy to read chapters feature numerous ideas and activities in the areas of (a) phonological awareness and beginning phonics, (b) phonics and sight word instruction, (c) reading fluency, (d) vocabulary and reading comprehension, (e) spelling, (f) handwriting and written expression, (g) basic math skills, and (h) math problem-solving. Additionally, the authors discuss general principles of evidence-based instruction and the relevance of cognitive abilities to academic interventions.

Chapter topics include an overview of the academic area, characteristics of individuals experiencing difficulty in the specific area, and a variety of ways to design and implement specific instructional interventions. The strategies, tools, and activities presented by the authors are straightforward, formatted in a step-by-step fashion, and supported by the most recent evidence-based research. Key concepts are highlighted throughout the text with illustrative examples and significant "Caution," "Don't Forget," and "Rapid Reference" callout boxes. Each chapter concludes with applicable "Test Yourself" questions. The authors also provide a number of helpful websites, commercially available programs, and a comprehensive reference list.

I highly recommend *Essentials of Evidence-Based Academic Interventions* as a useful reference tool for practitioners, school psychologists, and related professionals. This book is teacher-friendly, offers relevant suggestions and informative

explanations, and contains the latest information on implementing effective evidence-based interventions in today's diverse classrooms. It would be an excellent professional resource for any classroom.

## References

Fuchs, D., Mock, D., Morgan, P. L., & Young, C. L. (2003). Responsiveness-to-intervention: Definitions, evidence, and implications for the learning disabilities construct. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 18*(3), 157-171.

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

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