



Alleman, Janet & Brophy, Jere (2002) *Social Studies Excursions, K-3: Book Two Powerful Units on Communication, Transportation, and Family Life*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Social Studies Excursions, K-3: Book Two is the second in a planned three-volume series that provides plans for social studies units in Grades K-3. Each volume in the series will cover three or more cultural universals commonly covered in elementary social studies. Cultural universals are defined as "basic human needs and social experiences found in all societies, past and present." Book One covers units on food, clothing and shelter. This second volume covers units on communication, transportation and family life. Alleman and Brophy (both professors of education at Michigan State University) have been collaborating on research regarding what children know about these basic social studies topics for a number of years. The results of their research have informed the development of these unit plans, which the authors see as supplements or substitutions for primary level social studies textbooks. Additionally, Alleman and Brophy incorporate some science topics and integrate the language arts into these plans through writing and a focus on appropriate children's literature that enhances the child's experience of the topics covered. The authors provide substantial background for their content-based unit plans in Chapter 1 of both volumes currently in print, linking their approach to principles of teaching for understanding, appreciation and life application, and teaching for conceptual change. They acknowledge the National Council for the Social Studies standards on curriculum and powerful teaching and learning (<http://www.ncss.org>) as influential guidelines in the final form of these units.

Book Two follows the same structure as Book One with different cultural universals as the themes of the three units.

- Chapter 1, Background: How and Why We Developed the Units, goes into considerable detail about the need for a substantial content base in primary grade social studies curriculum, summarizing current research and thinking about elementary social studies. The chapter also covers principles of teaching and NCSS and state standards for social studies that informed the development of the units; a summary of the six components common to each unit; and a description of the authors' approach to the development of elementary social studies units contrasting it with approaches that have been suggested by other researchers and curriculum developers in elementary social studies.
- Chapter 2, Implementation: Preparing for and Teaching the Units, provides steps that are suggested as a teacher begins to

plan for incorporating one or more of these units into a social studies curriculum. Steps offer detailed and specific suggestions, such as lengths of time to teach, frequency of teaching times during a week, advice on presenting particular types of activities within the units, etc. These steps are based on the experience of Barbara Knighton, who first taught these units and is listed as a contributor to the series, as well as on the experience of other teachers who used the units prior to publication. The role of parents and others in the child's home as partners in learning about the content of these units is emphasized.

- Unit Sections: The remainder of the book is divided into three sections, covering a unit each on communication, transportation and family living. Each section contains an introduction where the major concepts of the subject content of the unit are laid out, along with information from the authors' research on the knowledge children bring to the classroom about the subject. Interview questions used in the research as well as summaries of children's responses to those questions are provided so that the teacher using this book begins with an understanding of what the students in his/her classroom may already know-- understanding which can be built upon through the unit's activities. The introduction to each unit is followed by thirteen to fifteen lessons. Each lesson is further divided into Resources, Children's Literature, General Comments, General Purposes or Goals, Main Ideas to Develop, Teaching Tips from Barbara [Kingston], Starting the Lesson, Suggested Lesson Discussion (often with several options), Activity, Summarize, Assessment and Home Assignment. The home assignments include a sample letter to parents to send home with the child. Each lesson involves an activity that takes the students outside the classroom either during class or as part of the home assignment.

Alleman and Brophy have achieved their goal of providing content-rich units for elementary social studies units. The sequence of each unit builds from an examination of the cultural universal in terms of the today's U.S. society and builds back in time and outward to include other cultures' experiences with that universal. The unit sections are well laid out, with much practical advice to the teacher. The list of recommended children's literature for each lesson has been carefully selected, based on the authors' stated belief that children's literature must be carefully examined to ensure that it is not misleading and does not portray dated or stereotypical views. They recommend using non-fiction, rather than fiction, for most children's literature selections for these units. The volumes in this series are designed for the practicing primary grade teacher, as well as for teacher education programs. The strong emphasis on content is certainly in keeping with trends in teacher education to include more discipline-specific content in teacher education courses. Implementing all the units in the two volumes currently available would be a significant undertaking. However, as the authors suggest, implementing lessons within a unit can substantially enhance primary grade social studies curriculum. The two volumes

available in the series are models of the integration of theory and practice. At a time when many schools of education are emphasizing the primary sources available on the Internet, some mention of these Web resources would make this volume and its companion truly comprehensive resources for the primary grade teacher interested in finding an alternative to elementary social studies textbooks and in developing a content-rich social studies program for the primary grades.

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Reviewed by Carla A. Hendrix, Plattsburgh State University of New York

Gupton, Sandra Lee (2002) *The Instructional Leadership Toolbox: A Handbook for Improving Practice*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

Sandra Gupton's book on instructional leadership is based upon a great deal of "real" experience and is seasoned with a healthy amount of real soul. The text is not based upon recent research, instead the *Instructional Leadership Toolbox* offers the reader the wisdom of a highly successful and respected educator of 22 years. Gupton has served as a public school teacher, an administrator, and for 11 years as a professor of educational leadership. The author presents what she feels is the essence of what leadership research and theory have taught us about what is needed to be an effective principal. She successfully brings together theory and research into a very readable and user-friendly textbook format.

The book's strength lies in its practical interpretation of the theory behind instructional leadership and its ability to provide principals with tools to improve their effectiveness on the job. Theory is presented in a practical manner. Gupton reframes the existing knowledge base into working everyday tools, not solutions and simple answers. The author believes that the complexities of instructional supervision are such that there are few simple answers.

Throughout the book Gupton reminds the reader of what is important in the principalship: the improvement of classroom instruction and student learning. She makes a strong case for student-centeredness and learner centered principles as espoused by the American Psychological Association (1993). The book's logical format assists readers to organize their thoughts about how the various functions of the principalship all lead back, either directly or indirectly, to what's happening in the classroom. Gupton suggests ways to maintain a steady course so as not to get so encapsulated by the trees that one does not see the forest, a common experience for many a busy school administrator. The reader is helped to stay focused on what's best for

children and not get disconcerted by national reports, mandates, accountability, and annual tests. Gupton's book serves as a facilitator for principals who have become lost in the abyss requiring them to do so much for so many. The reader is guided to addressing two important questions: 1. Where do I anchor myself? and 2. How do I maintain a steady course?

Sandra Gupton skillfully introduces a different tool metaphor with each of the 10 book chapters, Each tool has the potential to assist principals to improve their leadership skill and therefore, children's learning.

- Chapter One "A School Leader's Compass: In Whose Interest?" sets the stage for the entire book. Great importance is given to the principal being anchored. This chapter stresses the importance of understanding, thinking through, and articulating a personal vision for what a good school is. It also advocates anchoring values that pin themselves to helping students.
- Chapter Two "The Nut and Bolts of School Leadership" looks at what literature is telling us about instructional leadership and what the various commissioned groups and leaders in the field say are important proficiencies for today's principals. This chapter helps the reader to consistently and continually gauge where they are, and where the standards in the profession say they should be.
- Chapter Three "Blueprints for Success" addresses the basic processes and products or blueprints that guide the daily operation of the school. The first two chapters of the book guided the reader from self reflection on to the national-state arena in terms of what the profession feels is important. This chapter addresses the importance of having a well grounded, value based set of blueprints for success.
- Chapter Four "A School's Organizational Superglue" provides insight into ensuring a positive school culture based upon both teaching and learning. It offers a number of excellent suggestions that should help a school leader set in motion conditions for the development of the desired school culture. Gupton considers this tool critical and recognizes that school culture is not determined by only one person, but by the entire school community.
- Chapter Five "Organizational Conduits: Communication Strategies for Effective Instructional Leadership" is closely related to school climate. Presented are strategies for improving school communication. This chapter helps the principal deal with how to establish strategic, healthy communication conduits.
- Chapter Six "A Learning Organization's Whetstones: Best Leadership Practices for Facilitating Professional Growth and Development" discusses a number of powerful tools for ensuring best practices from professionals in the form of reflective practice, supportive supervision, and cooperative evaluation. Gupton suggests that if a school is going to be on the real cutting edge, one wetstone or sharpener must be effective staff development.

- Chapter Seven "The Lens of Instructional Leadership" addresses the importance of the principal focusing the work of the school on what's happening in the classroom. Gupton uses the American Psychological Association's "Principles of Learner Centered Schools" as the spine of this chapter and challenges the reader to take these principles to heart.
- Chapter Eight "Tape Measures, Plumb Lines, and Common Sense: What Counts in Accountability" deals with the issue of accountability without which no book on the principalship would be complete. This chapter helps the principal take a sensible look at what true accountability is all about. Chapter eight is a powerful chapter that draws its strength from the wisdom of some of the most powerful voices and thinkers in the profession and should help anchor the principal when dealing the accountability issues.
- Chapter Nine "The Instructional Leader's Power Tools: Cutting-Edge Leadership Strategies" addresses the importance of data based decision-making. In today's world which is often characterized by "knee jerk" reactions, it is important for school leaders to experience a "gut" check from time to time before making important decisions. These decisions need to be based upon strong data.
- Chapter Ten "The Ultimate Leadership Tool: Personal Fitness" brings the reader full circle to the book's first chapters where was he/she was asked to take a real strong introspective look at what they stood for and what anchored them as a person. The focus of this chapter is on personal fitness, not just skills, but fitness as a whole person. Quoting Gupton "You really are, after all, in the school, no greater person then what you are when you go home."

The Instructional Leadership Toolbox can be used by the practicing principal as a bit of a "gut check" from time to time through the use of a reflection box appearing at the end of each chapter. This box provides pointers to keep the administrator grounded on what is really important. This handbook offers great flexibility to put an individual spin on leadership and encourages personal reflection on questions designed to help principals find the direction most fitting to their situation and school context. Sandra Gupton suggests that tools are needed to do our best and keep us at our best and offers the educational leader a quality toolbox.

Reference

Presidential Task Force on Psychology in Education & American Psychological Association (1993). *Learner-centered psychological principles: Guides for school design and reform*. Washing, DC: American Psychological Association/Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory.

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Miller, Debbie (2002) *Reading with Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

In *Reading with Meaning*, Debbie Miller, a first grade teacher in Denver with thirty years teaching experience, has written a thorough explication of her very personal and successful approach to teaching reading. Early in the book she states "my focus is on helping children develop strategies for comprehension," and those looking for strategies for teaching children words and sounds will not find them here. Instead, Miller engagingly articulates how she helps her students develop into "thoughtful, independent and strategic readers." (p. 49)

Reading with Meaning provides a straightforward, helpful organization, with Miller laying out her guiding principles and overall goals for teaching comprehension in the first chapter. Subsequent chapters represent each month of the school year, in which she describes what reading comprehension skill she wants to address that month and how she goes about achieving her goals. Each chapter contains specific, concrete examples of student activities and descriptions of student interactions. Miller refers to research in reading to support her approach and includes a bibliography covering both the professional literature on the topic and the children's books she discusses in class.

Miller is an interesting, entertaining writer and her passion for teaching and love of her students are evident throughout the book. Liberally sprinkled with samples of her students' efforts, the discussion of her strategies lays out a kind of curriculum for teaching comprehension and makes clear that what Miller accomplishes in the classroom can be replicated by other teachers. Not every instructor will have the ambition or the time to incorporate Miller's methods and curriculum into her own teaching. But, if the increase in student reading comprehension that Miller observed in her own students is any indication, doing so is well worth the effort.

Pages: **193** Price: **\$21.00** ISBN: **1-57110-370-4**

Reviewed by Shellie Jeffries, Aquinas College

Rodis, Pano; Garrod, Andrew; & Boscardin, Mary Lynn (2001) *Learning Disabilities & Life Stories*. Needham Heights, MA : Allyn and Bacon.

The editors have given us a book that should be added to any educator's library. Former students with learning disabilities share their life stories in a personal and deeply passionate way. The reality of these accounts makes this book differ from similar books written on the subject. The authors capture their audience through reality and truths, hoping to guide the average person on a journey toward understanding of a world most know little about. They speak of the pain of isolation and feelings of failure. Readers are able to escape into the world of disabilities as never before. Aaron Piziali, one of the students, states it best:

I am a prisoner, a survivor, a target, and a struggler, continuously defending, negating, and recreating myself. My disability? My disability is that I have been disabled, as well as discouraged and discounted by a temporarily able-minded, able-bodied general public (p. 31).

Written with a variety of educators, as well as students, in mind, the authors saw the book as the ideal textbook for college level classes on learning disabilities. Working in the field of education, I can attest to the ignorance of many on the subject. With this ignorance comes neglect and negative feelings. We tend to ignore what we don't understand. With IEP's, 504 plans, and psychological testing year after year, many professionals key in on the weaknesses of students, forgetting the positives they bring. As one of the author's states, "Could it be that we have terribly underestimated them, and that this underestimation is a palpable wrong?" (p. xxii) This statement reaffirms the need to look at the whole child, not only the disability.

The authors point out in the last few chapters that the first step in any of these processes is to simply listen. Because teachers often have little time to deal with students who are disruptive or have other learning disabilities within the classroom, they are shuffled from person to person, with the student getting lost in the paper trail of special education. This book takes us on this journey with each student, sometimes sadly, but often with hope.

I agree with the authors that educators need to find ways to educate the public, parents, and teachers on how to acknowledge the problems, and deal with them so each child will feel accepted. In writing this book, the authors help us realize the failures of our educational system where students with learning disabilities are most often not given a chance to express their feelings of hurt and anger, although many do not know they can express their feelings. *Learning Disabilities & Life Stories*

was written for all of us, so that we never forget that all students should have equal opportunities in the eyes of educators, giving each child a voice. All children need to know they have a place in society and that we will be ready to help them get there safely.

The strength of this book is the honest and straightforward stories of those who lived through things we can only imagine. I will recommend this book to my colleagues as I continue in the field of education. I know that I will look at things in a new light because of the overpowering stories in this book.

Pages: **242** Price: **\$35.00** ISBN: **0-20532010-4**

Reviewed by Toni Arthur, Pt. Loma University, San Diego, CA

**Topping, Donna & McManus, Roberta (2002) *Real Reading, Real Writing: Content Area Strategies*.
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

Real Reading, Real Writing is an accessible and engaging collection of teaching strategies for integrating literacy across the school curriculum. The authors present the convincing argument that "we must teach not only the content but also (and more important) the processes of learning". To the authors, this means not assuming that the Language Arts teacher is the only person responsible for teaching students how to read and write. It means that the authors are "committed to engaging students, cross- curricularly, in the processes of reading; modeling the behavior we want to engender; and helping them become strategic learners not just for today but for a lifetime".

The creative and practical strategies offered here were developed during the teaching careers of two highly experienced and successful teachers who have brought their respective strengths in literacy and science to the text. Topping is now at Millersville University in Pennsylvania teaching literacy to teacher candidates while McManus teaches science in a middle school in Pennsylvania. Topping provides the theoretical and research background for the practical ideas created and used by McManus in her science classrooms, giving the reader the benefit of their combined thinking and practice. The authors' collaborative voice is used to full advantage in the text to create a teaching guide that is conversational in tone and that is organized into logical chapters and sub-headings that facilitate browsing and that make locating specific activities easy. Although there is no index the detailed Table of Contents provides adequate direction to the dozens of instructional strategies and activities described in the text.

"Donna" and "Roberta" open the first chapter with their teaching stories to explain how they both arrived at the same realization that all teachers need to model literate behaviors in their classrooms and

schools. Although the focus of the book is on the middle school science curriculum and classroom, teachers will find instructional ideas here that can be used in many subject areas and in grades both above and below the middle level. Readers will be impressed with and will benefit from the fine crafting of the learning activities created and modified by McManus and the excellent instructions that accompany each idea. The activities range from the creative use of Venn diagrams for reading review and card games for learning vocabulary to the use of Survey Question Read Recite Review (SQ3R) as a way of approaching formidable science textbooks. The three chapters at the core of this book focus on "Making Reading Happen" by offering activities that enrich and direct the reading experience both before, during, and after the act of reading. Many of the ideas in these three central chapters will read as just plain common sense, but the valuable links to subject content that McManus interweaves in her lesson plans provide teachers with a workable approach to improving comprehension in the subject classroom.

Sample classroom handouts are helpfully included both throughout the text and in appendices, completing the activity descriptions provided in the text. A list of favorite student science books and a comprehensive list of professional reading is also included. This is a highly recommended text intended for classroom teachers. Beginning teachers will especially value this book for the detailed descriptions of lesson ideas, for the inclusion of the reasons why these ideas work and for the exciting and enthusiastic approach the authors take to their teaching.

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Reviewed by Brenda Reed, Queen's University, Canada



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