



education review

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Chenfeld, Mimi Brodsky. (2002). *Creative Experiences for Young Children*. Third edition. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Mimi Brodsky Chenfeld showcases her passion for educating young children in her book, *Creative Experiences for Young Children*. Instead of chapters, the book is organized by six major themes. The themes are:

- our fantastic bodies/our amazing senses
- our feelings
- our uniqueness
- our families/our friends
- others we meet/our worlds widen
- our natural world/our environment.

Each theme is laid out in a similar format starting with an introductory section labeled "Think about it". The focus of the theme is driven home here with specific examples and stories from schools the author has visited. Next in the themes are points of interest and vocabulary words. The bulk of the themes are made up of learning activities to teach the specific theme. The activities are centered around language, dance, art, and counting.

Several times in the book Chenfeld makes the point that the children and their learning should be the most important priority at school, not testing or standards. She makes this point when she states, "children, and not materials or methodologies, are at the central core of education" (p.39). She also states that children are in danger of not learning freely "because of rigidity, narrowness, overly strict structures and schedules, overemphasis on drilling for isolated skills" (p.69).

Chenfeld remains upbeat and positive throughout her book. She sites specific examples from schools and teachers and suggests further readings on topics. *Creative Experiences for Young Children* will help serve as a guide to all pre-school and kindergarten teachers with great ideas and lesson plans. The appendices even offer field trip ideas, a list of books for children, and a list of books for educators.

Pages: **252** Price: **\$24.50** ISBN: **0-325-00367-X**

Reviewed by Jeff Luzius, Auburn University

**Graves, Donald H. (2002). *Testing is Not Teaching: What Should Count in Education*.
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

In his latest book, Donald Graves, a renowned education author and scholar, responds to the current emphasis on standardized testing in public schools. Through a series of 22 short, poignant essays, he claims that administrators and other decision-making bodies have ignored students and teachers. In the first essay, Graves clearly states the book's overarching thesis and title, which is "Testing is not teaching." Throughout the book he suggests that modern schools focus too much time on testing, to the detriment of the development of reading and writing skills in meaningful contexts. Graves explores some of the problems associated with testing and suggests ways that teachers can deal with the testing craze. Rather than analyzing all 22 essays individually, this review will offer a global perspective and focus on the major themes in the book.

Problems Caused by Standardized Testing. Graves identifies several problems associated with standardized testing. In the tenth essay, he expresses his belief that high quality education is eroding in the face of so much standardized testing. He states, "Children have less and less access to well-prepared teachers," "professional control continues to lessen," and "the voices of educators are not more forthright in commanding attention on the national scene" (pp. 40-41). What disturbs Graves the most is that many students are considered "alliterate," meaning that they "can read but choose not to because there's no real opportunity to engage with books" (p. 2).

In addition to teacher- and student-related problems, Graves discusses the misuses and misunderstandings that schools and the general public have about testing. For example, many proponents of testing argue that America is losing the international race against other countries and that the solution is to introduce competition into the school system. In his fifth essay, Graves agrees that competition serves a purpose; however, it is currently misplaced. He contends, "In reality, most of the tests that children take are really assessing their teachers. The district, state, and federal governments want to know which teachers are teaching the children well" (p. 19). Rather than competing against each other where winners

and losers can be easily determined, Graves proposes that schools compete against a standard of "curiosity, initiative, sensitivity to others, and the capacity to regulate oneself" (p. 21). The reader clearly knows that Graves does not support standardized testing; however in the chapter entitled "Accountability," he offers a more tempered approach when he says that "we can keep some elements of assessment that lend themselves to standardized approaches, but much more funding needs to go into creating far more challenging procedures" (p. 38). He recognizes the value in comparing students in one part of the country to another. He states, "A mother in Duluth wants to know if her child can ultimately compete for admittance to Harvard" (p. 37).

Furthermore, the general public does not completely understand the standardized testing. Graves breaks from the form of the previous essays and inserts an interview with a businessman in the book. Graves asks him to discuss his hiring practices and the ways that employers determine a potential worker's skill level. The businessman ultimately realized the difficulty of assessing people, and more importantly, he realized the difficulty that teachers face when assessing students' learning. An examination of the general public's naiveté continues in the sixteenth chapter entitled "What's That For?" in which Graves wonders if "colleagues, administrators and politicians understand the function of education" (p. 69). Do standardized tests reflect true learning? Do the students understand the purpose of testing? And do people really understand the importance of literacy, which serves as a basis for many tests?

Possible Solutions to Standardized Testing. Graves does not simply criticize standardize testing and then leave the reader without any tools to deal with it. Instead, he proposes strategies that focus on three areas: literacy, students and teachers. Since Graves is a scholar in the area of literacy, he offers alternative ways in reading and writing to resolve the challenges of education. In the eleventh essay he states that children should present the teacher a list of books that they have read. Teachers would select some of these books and ask the students to retell, relate and discuss the relevance to their lives. When it comes to writing, Graves suggests that students prepare topics of personal interest. They would "marshal their thinking by reading and turning over possibilities in their minds" (p. 46). On the day of the test the students would write about these prepared topics.

Graves contends that teachers and decision makers need

to rethink the qualities that are necessary for learners in the twenty-first century. He contends, "Until we can begin to agree upon what basics make up this ideal learner, it will be difficult to consider the best assessment approaches to tell us if our schools are succeeding" (p. 23). In addition to qualities of curiosity, initiative, sensitivity to others, and the capacity to regulate oneself, Graves believes that the ideal learner should also possess expressiveness, the ability to pose the right problem and the ability to discriminate. In the chapter entitled "The Child is the Most Important Evaluator," he outlines ways that these skills and dispositions can be developed. He proposes that classrooms should focus on fostering students' literacy skills. When students write, revise and evaluate their work, they acquire the necessary skills to succeed in the modern world. Standardized testing may hinder the development of these skills. He states, "Such elements as initiative and the ability to formulate questions, relate and integrate sources, engage in good long thinking, get lost in our rush to measure quickly and cheaply" (p. 33). He continues, "Current tests require one right answer and are conditioning American children to think this is what learning is all about" (p. 34). The idea of "long thinking" is further emphasized in the fourteenth essay. Long thinkers are problem finders, enjoy their own company, have a sense of play, are highly focused and have been appreciated by other long thinkers. He writes, "Writing, when well taught, establishes knowledge territory for the thinker" (p. 58). When students write, they formulate ideas and then put them down on paper. Writing allows students to ponder ideas for a long time and to share and develop them with others.

Developing these skills takes time and a shift in thinking. In three essays toward the end of the book, Graves examines the role of time and its effect on education. He retells a personal story about his sabbatical to Scotland. His daughter, Laura, accompanied him and attended Scottish schools taking courses in sports, dance, music and theater. Laura always felt relaxed and eager to learn. On the contrary, when she returned to America, she felt stressed and overwhelmed with the regimented school schedule. His daughter's independent reading dropped significantly because she was so stressed. To combat the time crunch, Graves urges teachers to remain focused on the children and build a strong rapport with them. Spending time with the students, modeling appropriate learning behaviors, and working alongside them help the teacher to gain a better understanding of the amount of time to complete tasks.

As much as he criticizes testing, he praises teachers. Throughout the book, Graves explores the important role of teachers in educational reform. In the second essay he talks about the "freedom factor." He states, "Americans are blessed with confidence born of freedom to respond positively to problems around them. Great things happen when initiative is in the hands of individuals" (p. 7-8). Only when teachers are given freedom, will productive solutions be generated. He again praises the important role of teachers play in students' lives and explores the power in the teaching and learning process. He claims, "In most cases, teachers are in positions when working with their students. Teachers have the power of assignments, corrections and grades. The best teachers know how to share this power; indeed they give it away" (p. 11). Graves argues that teachers possess the knowledge and ability to improve schools. In an affirming statement he says, "But the teacher is closest to the student and usually knows what works" (p. 51). The constant denigration of teachers may produce negative results. Graves worries, "My greatest concern is that teachers will look up to the 'wisdom' of power and authority instead of down to the children who are the source of what needs to be taught" (p. 51).

Graves ends the book with two positive, upbeat and hopeful chapters. He claims, "Children are the future of this country" and "enormous, diverse potential lies in every child" (p. 90). Praising the teacher once again, Graves states, "It is the teacher who makes the greatest difference" (p. 91). In the last chapter, he tells a childhood story of when he was a Boy Scout. On one hiking expedition the leader did not talk much to the scouts during the arduous climb. As a result, the scouts questioned their ability to complete the difficult task. On another expedition the leader motivated his troop with a positive attitude and an emphasis on teamwork. Graves claims that these stories are analogous to the legislation "Leave No Child Behind." The ability to encourage or discourage children rests with the stakeholders and educators. Graves suggests that standardized testing may leave children behind.

Pages: **112** Price: **\$15.00** ISBN: **0-325-00480-3**

Reviewed by Nathan Bond, Southwest Texas State University

Hoekstra, Molly, ed. (2002) *Am I Teaching*

***Yet? Stories from the Teacher-Training Trenches.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

An education professor recently told of her surprise when one of her students complained that she made teaching sound like it was hard work. *Am I Teaching Yet? Stories from the Teacher-Training Trenches* is most definitely proof that yes, teaching is hard, and but it also confirms that for those blessed with pedagogical talent it is the only place to be.

On the surface, Editor Molly Hoekstra's arrangement loosely follows a path from the beginning of student teaching to the fulfillment of a career spent in education. But as the reader journeys through this collection of essays written by new teachers, veteran teachers and teachers who decided that the classroom wasn't for them, a fitting rhythm appears. The uplifting, happy stories of finally reaching the resistant student are not all bundled together in one pretty package. But at the same time, the frighteningly sorrowful works are not joined in a group of overwhelming despair.

Rather these realistic tales bounce around from success story to anger to hope to sadness and back to hope again. Before the reader can become too caught up in happy endings and feeling that everything is rosy, an all too real essay on disappointment or failure brings back reality and the reminder that teaching is indeed, hard.

However, a feeling of hope pervades. Juxtaposed against an angry vent aimed at a substandard master teacher is the story of Olympia, a low achieving student finding her voice in Maya Angelou's words. Contrasting with recitations regarding master teachers abandoning student teachers to the class so they could smoke, the essay "Best and Brightest" displays the camaraderie and fellowship between teachers, as a new teacher learns from the experience of her colleagues.

Nontraditional teachers are not forgotten. A poet-in-residence smiles at the end of a grueling day. An unschooled tutor tries valiantly but unsuccessfully to teach an elderly immigrant to read. These voices are heard along with those who chose a path other than teaching.

The lone essay in the final section, "Final Word of Advice," ends the collection reflecting on a career well-spent and the importance of finding the colleague/friend who will "chew the bones of life with you."

On the surface this collection appears to be for the student trying to choose a career path or for the student teacher feeling alone. But it is also nobly illustrates how hard and how fulfilling it is for those teachers in the trenches.

Pages: **168** Price: **\$17.00** ISBN: **0-325-00402-1**

Reviewed by Melissa Cast, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Mardell, Ben. (2002). *Growing Up in Child Care: A Case for Quality Early Education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

During the last three decades, there has been ongoing debate over whether the quantity or quality of time parents spent with their children was more important. Ben Mardell reports in his book that only one of six centers in this country is of high quality. The state of American child care, compared to other industrialized nations, is not as it should be.

This book is valuable because it describes what quality child care is. Mardell tells about his work at the Oxford Street Daycare Cooperative and of some of the memorable learning that took place there. He had the opportunity to work with the children as they grew older and compare their early and later experiences and behaviors. The children worked together as a community of learners even though they varied in age and ability. Stimulating activities and attitudes provided by the staff, such guitar playing and valuing music, had a direct influence on the behavior of the children.

The book includes many pictures of the children and several of their drawings. These help the reader form an association with the children in Mardell's stories and this connection is helpful in understanding the children's development over time. It is especially interesting to hear about specific events such as the wildcat drawings, where you could read about and then see the progression of a child's understanding and ability to draw things she heard about and how these drawings were enriched by a visit to a museum.

Mardell's book offers insight to quality child care programs and would be of interest to child care staff as well as parents. Experienced teachers of young children

will probably have the greatest connection to the book and its stories, as they are likely to have seen similar development in their own students. The message for all that read the book is the same: quality child care programs do exist and can offer an environment which is nurturing and enriching to the child's development.

Pages: 112 Price: \$15.00 ISBN: 0-325-00424-2

Reviewed by Dr. Kathleen E. Fite, Southwest Texas State University

Moss, Barbara. (2003). *Exploring the Literature of Fact: Children's Nonfiction Trade Books in the Elementary Classroom*. New York: The Guilford Press.

In *Exploring the Literature of Fact: Children's Nonfiction Trade Books in the Elementary Classroom*, Barbara Moss uses classroom-tested activities as concrete examples of how elementary teachers can use nonfiction literature in their teaching. The goal of the book as stated by its author is to convince teachers that "nonfiction trade books are literature and should be treated like literature in classrooms" (p. vii). Chapter topics will help preservice teachers or any teacher wishing to expand classroom resources to include nonfiction literature. The solid content makes this book a useful text for a reading methods or children's literature course. Topics include advantages of nonfiction, especially over the limitations of textbooks; guidelines for selecting quality nonfiction trade books; how to include nonfiction as part of a reading curriculum, including organizing the classroom for nonfiction literature study; helping students read nonfiction strategically; guiding student response to nonfiction, both oral and written; and practical uses of nonfiction to support content area learning.

Elementary teachers will also appreciate the attention paid to multicultural considerations when selecting nonfiction trade books. Specific classroom activities, lessons and discussion points are an integral part of each chapter and include references to specific titles of nonfiction children's trade books encompassing all grade levels. Reference citations and a children's literature annotated bibliography close each of the five chapters. Not as useful is the brief appendix which lists recent

(1990-2000) nonfiction winners of the Orbis Pictus Award sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English. Other content specific national organizations have similar best books lists, some of which are identified within the text. It would be preferable to have a more complete listing with website addresses that allow teachers access to past as well as most recent "best books." This small shortcoming does not detract from the overall value of *Exploring the Literature of Fact* to enrich classroom literacy and content area learning while appealing to the natural curiosity of children about real things that make up their world, both in the past and present.

Pages: **195** Price: **\$22.00 [paperback]** ISBN: **1-57230-546-0**

Reviewed by Sandra R. Glass, Arizona State University

Ritchhart, Ron. (2002). *Intellectual Character: What it is, Why it Matters, and How to Get it*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.

In *Intellectual Character*, Ron Ritchhart asserts that "what stays with us from our education are patterns: patterns of behavior, patterns of thinking, patterns of interaction. These patterns make up our ...intellectual character... This is the kind of long-term vision we need for education: to be shapers of students' intellectual character" (p. 9). He challenges current methods of evaluating a student's ability or "smartness," arguing that passing tests or getting good grades doesn't mean that real thinking occurs or that the content sticks.

Intellectual Character is divided into three sections: theory, case studies, and practical applications. Resist the temptation to skip the over the theory in the hurry to learn "how to do it." The theory presented is very readable and engaging. Ritchhart examines the theories of critical thinking from both philosophical and educational perspectives, summarizing these dispositions or habits of mind in a series of charts. He then identifies the common themes found in these lists (p. 27):

- Creative thinking: open-minded, curious
- Reflective thinking: metacognitive
- Critical thinking: seeking truth and understanding, strategic, skeptical

Environments that encourage these types of thinking make use of models, consistent expectations, explicit instruction, and opportunities for practice. Students draw on their inclinations, motivations, awareness, and abilities to demonstrate their learning.

The middle section describes the actual class discussions and activities of the six teachers Ritchhart followed throughout his study of intellectual character. In the appendix, he describes the process of selecting and observing the teachers. He focused on two subjects, mathematics and social science, as taught in middle school. The teachers taught at diverse schools, urban and suburban, large and small, private and public. He followed the teachers over the course of one academic year, observing the classrooms at three different times during the year. It is important to note that while these teachers demonstrate excellent teaching models, they are not perfect. Ritchhart mentions that the teachers had good days and bad, missed opportunities and frustrations. How liberating! The book is not about being a perfect teacher, but rather about making progress and teaching what really matters.

Chapter four examines ways teachers can develop a culture of thinking during the first days of school, including: jumping right into big issues; physical classroom environment; and modeling expected forms of interaction and dialogue. Chapter five focuses on classrooms routines: housekeeping, management, discourse, learning and thinking. Effective routines have few steps, are easy to learn, and are repeated until they become automatic. Thinking routines include brainstorming, KWL (know, want, learn), and CSQ (claim, support, question). These routines transcend grade levels, subject matter, and even school itself. The chapter explores ways that thinking routines can enable exploration of ideas, how this can be managed and documented, and ways of coming to know new things. Chapter six explores the relationship between language and thinking. The language of thinking can be grouped into four broad categories: process, state, product, and stance. The last chapter of this section describes how to develop thought-full environments by focusing on big ideas, fostering engagement, modeling, and attitude.

The last section presents ways teachers can explore and implement the ideas described in the book. In chapter eight, Ritchhart quotes Parker Palmer, author of *The Courage to Teach*: "Technique is what teachers use until the real teacher arrives." Teachers need to examine their

core beliefs and mental models of thinking. The author diagrams the mental models of thinking for all six teachers represented in his research. In chapter ten, he outlines how teachers can do this for themselves. Ritchhart states, "in order for teachers to develop students' ability in, inclination toward, and awareness of thinking, teachers must possess these qualities themselves" (page 211). In chapter nine, he encourages teachers to break the rules of "so-called effective teaching." A first step for developing a thought-full classroom is to identify the "big ideas" of the curriculum. Effective dialogue and critical thinking is best nurtured by actively trying to understand these big ideas. Finally, Ritchhart recommends teachers find a support network to help them as they examine and develop new ways of teaching. He suggests that teachers examine their core values and the key ideas of the curriculum, giving oneself time to develop methods that foster intellectual character.

Ritchhart uses many charts and diagrams throughout the text, and summarizes the key ideas of each chapter. The ten-page bibliography is full of current research and oldies but goodies in the field of education. Overall, a satisfying and inspiring read!

Pages: **336** Price: **\$24.95** ISBN: **0-7879-5683-X**

Reviewed by Kathy M. Irwin, University of Michigan-Dearborn



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