



**Allington, Richard L. (2002) *Big Brother and the National Reading Curriculum: How Ideology Trumped Evidence.*
Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.**

This book is the reading area's response to the report released by the National Reading Panel (NRP) in April 2000 that generated the "evidence-based" instruction standard for reading pedagogy. Essays by Allington and other reading educators present a scathing condemnation of the report.

The book is divided into two parts and a conclusion. Part I, "Unreliable Evidence: Response to the National Reading Panel Report," attacks the composition of the panel, the methodology that was utilized, and the report's findings. Allington and others point out that the conclusions of this report do not mesh with previous research. One theme that emerges is their concern about the report's support of phonics over other methodologies and the lack of emphasis on reading comprehension. The essays are written by experts in the field of reading and include "The National Reading Panel Report [A Review]" by James W. Cunningham; "Beyond the Smoke and Mirrors: A Critique of the National Reading Panel Report on Phonics" by Elaine M. Garan; and "Babes in the Woods: The Wanderings of the National Reading Panel" by Joanne Yatvin.

Part II of the book, "Politics, Policies, and Profits: The Political Context of the National Reports," links the report to the political arena. The report is viewed as ideology disguised as scientific research. In "The Politics of Phonics," Frances Paterson links phonics policy to the Republican Party. She also refers to the Christian Right and concludes that "States with substantial or dominant Christian Right influence are more likely to have phonics provisions in their Republican Party platforms" (p. 173). Allington's essay in this section cites numerous studies related to decodable text and his concern that states such as Texas and California are legislating the use of decodable texts without evidence of their effectiveness.

In the conclusion of the book, "An Unwarranted Intrusion: The Evidence Against a National Reading Curriculum," Allington laments that "Maybe it is all about power rather than improving schools. Maybe it is more about making education more 'efficient'-read, cheaper-than about making schools richer and more engaging places for children to spend their young lives" (p. 261). I can hear sorrow as well as outrage and anger in this somber assertion. Allington concludes his final essay with the warning that "The federal push for a national reading curriculum is simply part of a much larger and much more dangerous

attempt to shift control of public education from those who are closest to it-local taxpayers and teachers-to those who sit in bureaucratic offices far from the classrooms they are attempting to control....There is much at stake here. The ideological push for a national reading curriculum is just the tip of the iceberg" (p. 284).

My reaction to this book is mixed. Allington's introduction really drew me in. He describes feeling like the Bill Murray character in the movie Groundhog Day who kept seeing the same things happen over and over again. Like Allington, many of the "new" education reforms remind me of the performance contracting, programmed learning, and competency testing that were in vogue when I entered the profession in the 1970's. I was prepared to wholeheartedly embrace the views expressed in his book, but by the time I finished reading it, I came away with some reservations. Although I was sympathetic to much of what was being said, I felt that his tone became "shrill." What is Allington trying to accomplish with this book? If he intends to influence educators, he is "preaching to the choir." If he intends to influence policy makers, his tone and blanket condemnations will likely put them on the defensive and result in their dismissing even his most valid criticism. The general public will probably view the book as just a liberal diatribe against the Bush administration's education policy.

Perhaps the book could have had more impact had Allington taken the advice offered in Cathy Toll's excellent essay, "Can Teachers and Policy Makers Learn to Talk to One Another?" Toll discusses the differing "discourses" represented by the National Reading Panel report and a report published by the National Education Association, a report that comes to a much different conclusion and that predictably invests more authority in individual teachers. She does not minimize the disagreements, but argues for "...a new way to conceptualize the issues, a way that might open up new ground for debate and for moving ahead" (p. 152). In order for real improvement to take place, the opposing sides need to listen to each other. My final reaction to the book was to agree with Toll's conclusion: "Perhaps it is time to open up a new discourse" (p. 152).

Libraries serving teacher education programs should purchase this book.

References

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Pages: **304** Price: **\$21.15** ISBN: **0-325-00513-3**

Reviewed by Sharon Naylor, Illinois State University

Booth, David (2002) *Even Hockey Players Read: Boys, Literacy and Learning*. Markham, Ontario: Pembroke Publishers, distributed by Stenhouse.

David Booth currently teaches at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, but he is better-known as a popular speaker and a prolific writer on issues related to the teaching and learning of reading and writing. In this latest offering Booth provides teachers, librarians and parents with a comprehensive collection of ideas about how boys can be encouraged to read and to write. He also urges teachers and parents to recognize that there are many boys who are already avid readers - but they may not be seen as such because they are not avid readers of the novels that may have been selected for them to read. Booth speaks both as an experienced educator and as a parent in this book and the audience is intended to include anyone who may influence the reading life of even a single boy. Booth explains in the Introduction that he wants to "examine the issues pertaining to the literacy lives of boys, how they perceive themselves as readers, and how parents, teachers and peers influence their literacy development" (p. 8). This goal is more than achieved in the text, as readers will find here not just an enjoyable narrative exploration of boys and literacy, but also multiple easily-implemented classroom practices and much helpful advice on how to encourage reading and writing by the boys in our classrooms, homes or libraries.

The format of this text encourages browsing - and even the most linear reader will find it hard to ignore the italicized sidebars where the voices of authors, teachers, researchers, and named and anonymous male readers of all ages are given space for a story from their reading life. Sometimes, in fact, these sidebars expand to consume whole pages, but the voices are worth the disruption to Booth's narrative because they have been carefully selected to illustrate how powerful and how personal reading experiences can be - whether they be positive or disappointing experiences. Another reason that these 'sidebar voices' are so tempting to read is that Booth has included in this space sections from a reading journal that he kept as his son Jay was growing up. These pieces, written by a father whose passion is the study of literacy development, are beautiful excerpts from a personal narrative and as such they shed much light on the topics covered by Booth's more analytical voice in the main text. Text boxes, short mini-chapters within major chapters, photographs of boys reading and a recurring section of brief research reports and teaching ideas called "Bringing Boys into Literacy" combine with the sidebars to make this a book built for browsers. Five chapters structure the book, with a total of 19 sections that have been styled after comments we have all heard from our students - such as "reading is what girls do," "this book is too hard" and "does spelling count". These headings draw the reader in to see what technique Booth has come up with to turn these familiar grumbles into positive reading and learning experiences.

Even Hockey Players Read is based on research but it is written for practitioners and not as a research report. Booth's list of interview questions is included at the back of the book and could be used by teachers or researchers to uncover details about the reading interests and the literacy lives of any students. This extensive back-of-the-book section also includes "Recommended Books for Boys" - helpfully broken down into 12 sections that include read-aloud resources, picture books, easy-read series, series for young boys, series for older boys, novels for young boys, novels for older boys and several more categories. These booklists will be invaluable for anyone who is called upon to recommend books to boys. The book ends with four pages of suggested professional reading and an author/title/subject index. This is a book that is based on the author's years of experience teaching children and teachers and it is brimming with his passion for books and for reading. If you have professional or personal connections with boys and reading and you enjoy an anecdotal approach to learning you will want to read Booth's excellent compilation of recent research and his inventive ideas for encouraging reading in boys.

Pages: **135** Price: **\$19.00** ISBN: **1-55138-147-8**

Reviewed by: Brenda Reed, Queen's University, Canada

Brown, Roberta Seckler, & Carey, Susan (2003) *Hands-on Word Family Activities for Young Readers: Ready-to-use Lessons and Activities for Building Literacy Skills*. San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.

Word families are a collection of words that have a shared characteristic or pattern. Word families contain similar letter combinations and sounds and are used as an aid in teaching young children to read. As described in the introduction of the book, Brown and Carey have written a book that can be used to give children real reading experiences by teaching word families in context.

Twenty-five sections were developed for the book, with each section containing three daily lesson plans. The lessons are comprehensive and contain usable objectives, materials lists and procedure for each word family. A variety of activities are also included in the lessons, from art projects, to blending strips, to challenge activities and reinforcement activities. The lessons can be done in a short amount of time, with some lessons containing one activity, and others containing numerous curriculum extenders.

The book contains numerous illustrations that can be used during the learning and teaching experience. Each lesson is shown with textual information and graphical line masters that can be photocopied or scanned. There are no page numbers on the line masters, which aids in

the copying process. The graphics are slightly amateur in appearance, which could detract some users, yet the cartoon affect of some of the graphics may appeal to younger children.

Primary teachers will find the book useful, offering lessons to strengthen current reading curriculum. For newer teachers the lessons and instructions for their use will aid in the development of teaching experiences. For the crafty instructor who uses a lot of manipulatives for learning, the book may provide additional opportunities for classroom practice. The main detraction is the graphics, otherwise the book is a good resource for the busy teacher.

Pages: **560** Price: **\$29.95** ISBN: **0-7879-6592-8**

Reviewed by Ru Story-Huffman, Cumberland College

**Coughlin, Deborah (2002) *How to Plan for the School Year: The Elementary Teacher's Essential Guide Book*.
Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.**

New elementary school teachers often find themselves not knowing where to begin with the many demands that are placed them. Experienced teachers, too, often look for resources to give them new ideas to keep their classrooms fresh and up-to- date. Deborah Coughlin has given both new and experienced elementary school teachers a valuable tool for organizing their curriculum and classrooms.

How to Plan for the School Year is an easy-to-read, step-by-step guide that begins with how and why to write a yearlong integrated curriculum and theme for the elementary classroom. It advises teachers to include all mandated and required standards, benchmarks, and tested materials for all content areas, as well as take into consideration the developmental approximations and social/cultural issues that affect students. The book gives instruction on how to set-up an aesthetically pleasing classroom that is functional and coordinates with the chosen theme. Coughlin then gives guidance on organizing a classroom management system which includes a section on "lists, letters, and forms", what kind of information to gather from students, and how to organize it.

The book is not only useful for the beginning of the year, but carries teachers through the year with hints on communicating with parents and professionalism. There are also appendices with a wealth of checklists, printable forms, charts, and letters; all useful for classroom management and teaching.

How to Plan for the School Year: The Elementary Teacher's Essential Guide Book has an appropriate title because it is a concisely written guidebook with essential information written for new and experienced

teachers alike. Organization, the book's central theme, is vital to having a well functioning elementary school classroom.

Pages: **192** Price: **\$20.00** ISBN: **0-325-00318-1**

Reviewed by Stephanie Walts-Osma, Southwest Texas State University

**Hahn, Mary Lee (2002) *Reconsidering Read-Aloud*.
Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.**

In *Reconsidering Read-Aloud* Mary Lee Hahn presents a convincing case for the importance of reading aloud in the classroom. As an elementary school classroom teacher she has refined the practice of reading aloud to students. Chapters of the book are The Roles of the Teacher, Choosing Books, Building Classroom Community, General Strategies, Fiction Strategies, Nonfiction Strategies, and Evaluation and Assessment.

According to Hahn, reading aloud to children provides a time for them to "learn without trying." Critical components of this learning are the facets of "listening, questioning, speaking, and visualizing" which require only "a reader, a book, and listeners." While read aloud time should be fun, it also serves as a useful teaching tool.

The teacher must provide the children with a reading role model. In order to be a reading role model, the teacher must first be a reader. It is essential that the teacher put reading at the heart of his or her reading instruction. This focus will allow the read-aloud experience to be a time of learning. The author provides discussion and examples in Chapter 1 to direct the teacher in the "Art of Teaching During Read-Aloud." The spontaneity of teaching and learning during the read-aloud time can provide both teacher and students with an opportunity to think on a different level.

The teacher who successfully serves as a reading role model will choose high quality books that provide enjoyment for both teacher and students. Hahn notes that "Read-aloud is your chance to introduce students to the award winners, to the newest books, to the classics." In chapter 2 she provides suggestions for finding good, reliable booklists. She reminds the reader that, in addition to providing enjoyment, the read aloud activity should encourage students to stretch their minds and their imaginations.

In Chapter 3 Hahn encourages teachers to use reading and read-aloud to help "create a basic classroom community." A classroom community is built on relationships, and read-aloud fosters relationships between the teacher, the students, and books. Related activities that help to build relationships include conversation about the material being read, rituals

in the classroom extending to read-aloud, student involvement in choice of reading materials discussion of topics of significance to the teacher and the students, and projects connected to the read-aloud material. Each of these activities involves the teacher, the students, and the books and provides an opportunity for sharing that will develop relationships in the classroom.

In Chapter 4, Hahn suggests many helpful strategies, including previewing strategies, using prior knowledge, reading with expression, visualization, strategies for remembering where you left off, vocabulary in context, better talk, and amazing response to simple text. She provides excellent tips and examples of why and how teachers should use these strategies when planning and implementing a read-aloud program.

Chapters 5 and 6, on fiction and nonfiction strategies are particularly useful. According to Hahn, the teacher using fiction for read-aloud should include spontaneous teaching, planned teaching, and inquiry-based teaching. The author offers numerous helpful techniques and tips for using read-aloud fiction effectively. She provides similarly helpful advice concerning nonfiction read-aloud. Hahn cautions against ignoring nonfiction, noting, "If our goal is to develop whole readers, nonfiction must get equal time in read-aloud" (p. 95). Each section in these two chapters provides book titles, first-hand examples of how a class might react during read-aloud times, and suggestions that give the teacher enough background to make a success of read-aloud in the classroom.

The final chapter summarizes Han's look back at the read-aloud year. Student by student, she recounts successes and struggles as she evaluates and assesses the year. She advises teachers to evaluate and assess by simply looking back over the year, considering the students' reactions and the results of read-aloud. Assessment can also be done in the guise of an informal questionnaire filled out by the students. Hahn's questionnaire, for instance, has only four questions.

Three appendices are included in the book: The "Favorite" Project" includes responses from elementary and middle school teachers, giving titles and authors of favorite read-alouds for their classroom. Appendix 2 is made up of "Reading at Home" forms, and Appendix 3 provides a chart that can be used by teachers to identify "when read-aloud is recognized as a teaching time" (p. 150).

This book supports the comment made by the author in the introduction, "I have begun to consider read-aloud an essential and central component in the teaching of reading in my classroom. When I began to focus my constant and critical attention on read-aloud, I was amazed to discover teaching I hadn't realized I was doing and learning that had likewise escaped my notice" (p. 4). *Reconsidering Read-Aloud* is a useful guide for all teachers who would like to incorporate read aloud activities into their classrooms.

Pages: **156** Price: **\$20.00** ISBN: **1-57110-351-1**

Reviewed by Naomi Williamson, Central Missouri State University



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