

**Cecil, Nancy Lee (2004) *Activities for a Comprehensive Approach to Literacy*. Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway Publishers.**

Reading teachers, reading tutors, and libraries that support the teaching of reading will want to purchase this excellent collection of creative, skill-focused literacy activities, although the author identifies preservice and inservice teachers as her main audience. The ideal audience for this book may be the individual language arts teacher, as the pages are perforated, making the activities easily removable to a teacher's own Teaching Ideas binder where each single-page, double-sided activity can be filed into a favorite subject scheme.

In the book, the collection of 100-plus activities is brilliantly organized into 11 distinct language skills to make it easy to locate an activity that will assist students to learn or improve a reading, writing or speaking skill. Librarians will want to scour the "Children's Literature" lists and "Other Resources for ..." lists that conclude each chapter. These lists contain the children's stories that are used in a chapter's activities and professional reading suggestions that are focused on best teaching practices and on providing a theoretical context for the activities in the chapter.

The author's annotations of these resource lists are clearly the work of an expert teacher, and the summaries of the professional books make it clear why other teachers would be interested in each title. If teachers or librarians are looking for professional resources on a range of topics connected to early literacy, these chapter reference lists offer "best of the best" selections of current resources from major authors and publishers. Cecil also notes that her *Striking a Balance: Best Practices for Early Literacy* (Holcomb Hathaway, 2003) and *Literacy in the Intermediate Grades: Best Practices for a Comprehensive Program* (Cecil, Nancy Lee and Gipe, Joan P., Holcomb Hathaway, 2003) are complementary texts for *Activities for a Comprehensive Approach to Literacy* because they provide a theoretical background for the practical activities.

The activities are arranged in a coherent series, from "Activities to Develop Early Literacy", to chapters that focus on phonics instruction, the development of oral language, spelling, vocabulary, reading comprehension, writing, reading in the content areas, the promotion of recreational reading, and "Activities for Working with Parents". Each chapter follows the same format, including a brief, usually 1-page introduction to the skill focused on in the chapter, followed by 8 to 10 classroom activities that Cecil has used and that have been proven to be successful with young students. The activities include whole class and small group work, with follow-up assessment at the individual student level. The activities typically require simple instructions, but encourage children to practice the development of a specific skill. For example, in "Silly Food Rhymes" part of the activity includes asking the children to think of their favorite foods and to substitute the first sound in the word with a different sound, for the purpose of "an enjoyable listening activity" and "practice in manipulating beginning sounds" (p. 65).

The early chapters are intended mainly for Pre-school to grade 3- level teaching, although in every chapter there are activities that could be used with various age groups if a teacher has students who need further practice with or instruction on a particular skill. The activities are explained within a well-designed format that always includes a suggested grade level, purpose,

materials, procedures, and assessment ideas. The materials are always easily obtainable, usually including nothing more exotic than construction paper, scissors, magazine pictures, and glue. Teacher reflection is encouraged by the inclusion of lined blank space at the conclusion of each activity labeled "Notes for next time...". Following the main activities in each chapter are "Other Ideas & Activities" that provide even more creative ideas for reinforcing the reading skills focused on in the chapter. For example, in the chapter that provides activities for spelling, other ideas include suggestions for teaching students how to create mnemonic devices, and a way of varying the calling out of spelling lists by offering clues to the words rather than just saying them.

Many of the activities in the book offer ways of reaching students with particular difficulties, such as students with fine motor coordination problems or those who need more practice with a particular skill. The author notes in her Preface that the activities "are designed expressly for, or are adaptable to, English language learners (ELLs) and therefore have the prerequisite sheltering necessary for this diverse population" (p. xi). Throughout the book Cecil indicates when an exercise is particularly appropriate for ELL learners – usually by noting that an emphasis on adding vocabulary is a part of the activity. The thoughtful attention paid to all learners adds value to the teaching activities that Cecil offers in this book. This author's attention to the reality of the classroom experience suggests that Cecil's current work as a professor of Education at California State University, Sacramento, and her previous experience as a reading teacher and specialist come together successfully here to provide a set of activities based on best practices and the evidence of current research.

Pages: **305** Price: **\$24.95** ISBN: **978-1-890871-52-4**

Reviewed by Brenda Reed, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Foster, Graham (2003) *Language Arts Idea Bank: Instructional Strategies for Supporting Student Learning*. Markham, Ontario: **Pembroke Publishers, distributed by **Stenhouse**.**

The *Language Arts Idea Bank* is designed to provide teachers of language arts with a variety of activities specifically designed to motivate and engage students. Based on the belief that motivated students are more likely to learn and less likely to disrupt the classroom, this book offers fifty learning activities that are aimed at engaging students in ways that are relevant and meaningful.

The book is divided into four sections: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Viewing and Representing. Each section is further divided into specific topics within the category. In the Reading section, for example, the activities are subdivided into Reviewing Reading Strategies, Promoting Close Attention to Text, Responding to Reading, Exploring Vocabulary and Encouraging Frequent Reading. Each subdivision is defined for the reader at the beginning of the section. Subdivisions contain three to four learning activities. The sections on reading and writing contain more learning activities, as those topics are generally given more emphasis in the language arts classroom.

Each learning activity is clearly laid out on a single page or facing pages, making the activities easy for the teacher to access and reproduce. The goal of the learning activity is defined, followed by a "How to Reach It" section that describes suggested ways in which a teacher could use this activity. Examples of completed worksheets accompany many of the learning activities. A sidebar on the left hand side of each page provides space for a brief summary of situations in which a teacher may find the activity useful. For the learning activity, "The Unfolding Method to Improve Comprehension," the sidebar reads,

“Students demonstrate limited comprehension of text and cannot identify personally effective reading strategies” (p.13). Skimming these sidebars allows the teacher to quickly find an activity relevant to an instructional situation.

There are innumerable books available that provide activities for the language arts classroom. Both the author and the publisher of this book of learning activities are Canadian and provide a fresh look to some of the standard language arts learning activities. Graham Foster has taught language arts, contributed to the development of the *Senior High School English Language Arts Guide to Implementation*, Alberta, Canada and is the author of four other books on language arts teaching. Pembroke Publishers was the first Canadian “pedagogical publisher,” producing about 60% of the practical, teacher-oriented books printed in Canada. The *Language Arts Idea Bank* also displays its Canadian origins with the last section of the book, Viewing and Representing, a section that focuses on media literacy—an emphasis found more in Canada and Australia than in the United States. Both novice and seasoned teachers of language arts will find activities in this book that will engage and motivate their students.

References

Canada. Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Interview with Mary Macchiusi, President Pembroke Publishers Limited. Markham, Ontario, March 15, 1999. Retrieved December 13, 2004 from http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/arts/ss_pembroke-en.asp.

Pages: 136 Price: \$19.00 (U.S.) \$18.95 (Canadian) ISBN: 1-55138-158-3

Reviewed by Carla A. Hendrix, SUNY Plattsburgh

Miller, Wilma H. (2005) *Improving Early Literacy: Strategies and Activities for Struggling Students (K-3)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.

The primary importance of fostering solid language skills with young students is a given. This being acknowledged, nothing is more frustrating than realizing that some youngsters start falling behind in the acquisition of these essential skills from almost day one of their schooling. Experiencing difficulty with initial reading skills and thus having a weak foundation, these children tend to fall farther behind as they continue through the system. As a "Catch 22" situation develops, the young person's confidence tumbles and he becomes discouraged and is unable to handle more demanding reading material.

Wilma Miller offers some practical classroom material on how to help young children master the early skills that will send them on to later grades as confident readers. Professor emerita of education at Illinois University in Normal, where she taught undergraduate and graduate courses for over thirty years, Miller makes it clear that she has not compiled a theory book about early childhood literacy. Rather, she is offering a sourcebook containing numerous classroom-tested strategies, games, and reproducible assessment devices as well as activity sheets.

One of the problems facing primary grade teachers is determining if a student is behind grade level or an individual's precise reading problems. Miller offers two forms of an Individual Reading Inventory for accurately assessing reading levels as well as reading strengths and weaknesses of children in grades 1-3.

The author provides games and activity exercises for improving listening and oral language skills, fostering the ability to discern word structure and context clues, and enhancing vocabulary and comprehension.

Each chapter in the book includes a pre-assessment device that the author hopes will focus the reader's attention on the content of that section. For example, the eighteen true and false questions for listening and oral language skills include these statements: Games are the most effective way of improving oral language skills (False). Oral language skills develop at about the same time as do written language skills (False). One minor glitch with these pre-assessment questions is that the reader is sent to the incorrect page to find the answers. Ignore the page reference and go to the Answer Key at the back of the book.

Whether it's creating puppets to motivate children to practice reading or adapting a three step strategy for teaching difficult sight words, there are so many useful ideas in *Improving Early Literacy* that every teacher will find some useful, reproducible material that can be put to use in the classroom immediately.

Pages: 336 Price: \$29.95 ISBN: 0-7879-7289-4

Reviewed by Robert F. Walch, retired educator, Monterey, California

Popham, W. James (2004) *America's "Failing" Schools: How Parents and Teachers Can Cope With No Child Left Behind*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

The question faced by many librarians probably will not be whether to purchase *America's "Failing" Schools: How Parents and Teachers Can Cope With No Child Left Behind*, but how many copies to purchase. The author, James Popham, is a recognized authority in the field of educational assessment and has written over 25 books. Popham has produced a highly readable account of the issues facing both the educators who must respond to the guidelines of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation and the parents who now may have the option of transferring their children to other schools.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section explains the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation and some of the rationale behind it. Popham's explanation is remarkably fair. He admits that he sees the current heavy-handed approach as at least in part the federal government's reaction to the "failure avoidance tactics" employed by states in the past. He also writes that "If NCLB is properly implemented, I believe it can lead to a far better education for our nation's children" (p. 44). That *if*, however, is the operative word, and much of the book addresses possible pitfalls.

One of the main problems Popham notes is the misuse of standardized tests. In the second section, "Some Nuts and Bolts of Educational Testing," he explains the concepts used in educational testing in a remarkably lucid and understandable way. He writes that "...educational testing is far less precise than most parents (and numerous educators) think it is" (p. 54). He points out that the high-stakes educational tests now being used, although good tests, are frequently inappropriate for what they are being used for, noting that "...they were never intended to be used to evaluate schools, and they just can't do that properly" (p. 67). The problem goes beyond inappropriate use, however. Popham does not speak favorably of the enormous number of content standards that teachers in most states now must address and uses the term "mushy" when describing many standards-based tests. However, he also writes that "...standards-based tests can work if they are deliberately constructed in a way that both supplies accurate accountability information for school evaluation and, at the same time, helps teachers do a better instructional job" (p. 82).

The third section, where Popham makes suggestions about how best to evaluate schools, is what truly distinguishes this book from other works about

NCLB. He suggests that evaluations of school quality should include, but not be limited to, standardized test scores. He recommends that a valid evaluation also should include students' work samples, nontest academic indicators, and affective data (p. 102). The conclusion of the book includes specific suggestions for educators, parents, and concerned citizens.

I think that the audience for this book should include policy makers. Popham writes compellingly and with the voice of reason. As was noted earlier in this review, he is very even-handed in his approach. Legislators are given credit for good intentions, and Popham's approach is to advocate improving a flawed system, not simply to condemn it. Although he makes his concerns about NCLB extremely clear, his tone does not become shrill or condescending, nor does he over utilize professional terminology or jargon.

America's "Failing" Schools was selected by the College of Education on my campus as the choice for a book discussion. The discussion was well attended and the book was extremely well received. The fact that it garnered considerable praise was probably predictable. Most of the educators I know are highly critical of NCLB, and they are justifiably concerned about its implications and implementation. One concern expressed by the faculty was that Popham did not adequately explain the impact or role of special needs children. Certainly, there are numerous questions yet to be answered about how special education students fit into NCLB, and this will probably be an area where we can expect challenges to the legislation. The question asked by one emeritus professor lingers in my mind. He asked whether we felt that Popham really addressed how to legitimize the rather complex model that he proposes be used in evaluating schools. I am not sure that he did, or that any model utilizing "affective" data would not be viewed as mushy (to use Popham's term) by legislators. Legitimizing an alternative model is probably the real issue that we as educators ultimately must be able to address if we are to avoid the narrow measurements placed upon us by legislation such as NCLB.

Both academic and public libraries should consider this book a necessary purchase.

References

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. 107-110. Accessed December 6, 2004 from <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html>

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Pages: **157** Price: **\$23.00** ISBN: **0-415-94947-5**

Reviewed by Sharon Naylor, Illinois State University

Sher, Barbara (2004) *Smart Play: 101 Fun, Easy Games That Enhance Intelligence*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley

Developed for parents and teachers by an educator with over thirty years of experience, *Smart Play* presents 101 activities to develop visual-spatial skills, verbal language skills, math skills, kinesthetic skills, and interpersonal skills for children 6 and under, 6 and up, or for all ages. The activities have been "tested" on hundreds of children in a variety of settings around the world

Each activity is introduced with a brief background, necessary materials, and explicit directions on how to replicate the creative activity. Numerous variations are also given so each activity has multiple avenues of play. Parents and teachers will be pleased to read the specific skills that the child learns by completing each activity.

In addition, an index is provided that outlines a list of activities based on which materials are available. For instance, 22 games require cans, newspapers, plastic bags, and popsicle sticks while 18 are presented which require no materials at all.

Overall, Smart Play will be an invaluable resource for parents and teachers of children of all ages.

Pages: 178 Price: \$14.95 ISBN: 0-471-46673-5

Reviewed by Dr. Melinda Pierson, Associate Professor, Department of Special Education, California State Fullerton

Sigmon, Cheryl M. & Ford, Sylvia M. (2004) *Just-Right Writing Mini-Lessons, Grade 1: 75 Mini-Lessons to Teach Your First Graders the Essential Skills and Strategies Beginning Writers Need*. New York: Scholastic.

This practical writing guide, written in the form of a Writing Workshop, is full of mini-lessons for first grade teachers that were compiled from the curriculum standards of 11 states. Explicit instructions are given on how to *teach* writing, not just *assign* writing. Examples are demonstrated throughout the book for clarity.

This wonderful guide is divided into six sections based on the *purposes* for writing. The six sections include Teaching Basic Concepts, Planning for Writing, Making Writing Cleaner and Clearer (Conventions), Making Writing Better (Revisions), Writing for Real Purposes and Audiences, and Publishing our Writing. The authors encourage teachers to “pick and choose appropriately based on your students’ needs and on opportunities to integrate lessons with other content you’re teaching” (p. 8). Although the lessons included in this book encompass all of the necessary writing components, teachers will appreciate the flexibility and creativity allowed within the lessons presented.

Excellent reproducible worksheets are included in the appendix. These include blackline masters of different types of paper to encourage different levels of writers, instructions for sequence books, little books, and full-page books, as well as instructions for making envelopes.

Overall, this is an outstanding resource for primary teachers as well as special education teachers who want to make writing fun for their students. Teachers will easily follow the 75 lessons and completely enjoy themselves while teaching!

Pages: 128 Price: \$15.99 ISBN: 0-439-43116-6

Reviewed by Melinda R. Pierson, Associate Professor of Special Education at California State University, Fullerton. Dr. Pierson was a classroom teacher for 8 years prior to becoming a teacher trainer. Her research focus areas are effective teaching methods in all subject areas and affective characteristics of students with mild/moderate disabilities.

Steinberg, Mark & Othmer, Siegfried (2004) *ADD: The 20 Hour Solution: Training Minds to Concentrate and Self-Regulate Naturally Without Medication*. Brandon, OR: Robert D. Reed Publishers

ADD: The 20 Hour Solution is a nine chapter book with three appendixes for a total of 215 pages. The chapters first explain ADD and ADHD and then go into

detail with the treatment process of neurofeedback. Appendix A supplies two successful case histories, Appendix B provides a commentary on the psychiatric classification of ADD/ADHD and Appendix C provides a neurofeedback practitioner listing.

For someone like myself, with no prior knowledge of neurofeedback training, the authors did a good job of explaining the process in layman's terms. They described the problems of ADD children as "deregulation" of the arousal systems in the brain. Steinberg and Othmer stress the importance of correcting problems in the central nervous system in order to resolve the issues of self-control and focus in children. Both authors believe the brain is capable of "self-healing" and that neurotherapy can accomplish this.

Steinberg and Othmer take the reader through the typical results of neurofeedback training. They say the first ten sessions lay the foundation for reorganizing patterns of brain response and flexibility. In sessions 11-20 the child forms and recognizes the brain state experience of clarity, focus and stable mood. The authors say that parents typically report that after about 10-20 sessions their children are less frustrated and don't get into conflicts as often. During sessions 21-40 the child should consolidate and integrate the responses he has learned from the structured mental challenges of neurotherapy. Forty 30 minute sessions yield the 20 hour recommendation that is the basis for this book.

The authors state that arousal functions and their regulation are closely tied to brain-body electrical signals. These are measured through the EEG (electroencephalogram) or brainwaves. An underactivated or overactivated brain reflects its irregularities in the EEG. Steinberg and Othmer believe that by challenging and modifying the EEG response, we can influence brain activation and, ultimately, the brain's control mechanisms for self-regulation.

Neurofeedback training is administered by having the child play a video game solely with his brain, with information provided by brainwaves that are monitored through electrodes attached to his head. There is no joystick or GameBoy console. According to the authors most children find the hook-up fun. The effects caused by the child's responses to the transformed display of his brainwaves are carried through the wires away from his brain, then amplified and displayed as various elements of video games. The child is instructed to make certain shapes and their corresponding colors bigger or smaller and in one game, fly a space rocket to win a race. As the child maintains consistency, game rewards accrue. The feedback is provided in real time and the child gets to monitor his on-task performance and his consistency over 30 minute sessions. In the rocket game there are three rockets. The middle one represents desirable brainwaves and the other two rockets represent adverse brain activity that should be minimized.

As a special education teacher with a particular interest in ADD, I was intrigued by the concepts presented in this book. The increased scores on the T.O.V.A. and WISC and ADDES behavior rating scales that Steinberg and Othmer report are impressive. These same results were reported by the University of Tennessee (Lubar, Swartwood, Swartwood, and O'Donnell, 1995) and by Lingenfelter (2001). In addition, the ERIC database <http://www.eric.ed.gov/> contains numerous other articles documenting the success of neurofeedback training for children with ADD. After reading this book and reviewing the other literature I feel that I could recommend this treatment as a valid option to parents and teachers.

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Pages: **215** Price: **\$14.95** ISBN: **1-931741-37-9**

Reviewed by Ivy Fautleroy, University of New Orleans

Steinberg, Shirley R. & Kincheloe, Joe L., editors (2004) 19 Urban Questions: Teaching in the City. New York: Peter Lang.

Steinberg and Kincheloe's book is about challenge and opportunity and how this dialectic plays out in urban schools. It is a book of questions which advocates for research in urban schools and institutions of higher learning to find answers. Kincheloe, the first essayist, suggests that the influence of multimedia on perceptions of urban schools and their students, predisposes middle class teacher education students to misjudge classes and students they encounter in urban schools. Consequently, unnecessary stress is placed on the students in these schools as they constantly battle negative stereotyping.

The contributors to this volume examine 19 questions with knowledge and insight in the hope of affecting change in the landscape where urban educators dwell. They encourage rhetorical change, moving from "at risk" language to a language that emphasizes "resilience" and the ability to rebound in spite of many obstacles, as well as change in structure, interpretation and assessment.

Kincheloe states in his essay, "Why a Book on Urban Education?" that there is not enough "compelling information about the subject for teachers and other professionals" and the intent of this book is to begin the necessary dialogue to fill the gap. Kincheloe points an accusing finger at schools of education and colleges of arts and sciences for failure to provide the scholarly work necessary to change the landscape of urban education. He maintains that fallacious information about urban students effectively keeps them away from entering the teaching profession and that white middle-class teachers are not encouraged to confront what it means to be a teacher in a culturally different setting, thereby exacerbating problems in urban schools (p. 11).

A second reason for writing the book is an effort to construct "a rigorous and just urban pedagogy." Kincheloe encourages moving away from standardized curricula and advocates taking "into account the unique situations and needs of particular urban students" (p. 20). Kincheloe urges pedagogical development by "expecting even more from our teachers and our teacher educators." He states that "the teacher- scholars emerging from these invigorated and rigorous teacher education programs will help transform urban schools into learning organizations" (p. 3). The editors of this volume gathered these essays in the hope of reforming a dystopian pedagogy by raising public consciousness about urban education.

Each chapter asks a poignant question and explores the question in depth. All of the authors are connected to urban education, each offering a unique perspective on issues ranging from dropout rates to the nature of assessment in an urban context to what it's like to be in a gang. One chapter on research in an urban setting gives insight into why so many urban schools are failing while another uses case studies to examine why students in urban schools have a high failure rate.

19 Urban Questions: Teaching in the City gives a close-up and personal look at the realities of teaching in an urban setting and offers answers that reflect thoughtful consideration. They are not always answers that teachers, administrators and community members want to hear, but they make sense if the goal is to improve teaching and learning in city schools. This is a comprehensive work that offers suggestions for technique, content and context, moving from technology to science to language arts. The authors offer personal experiences and case studies as reality checks. As a teaching/learning tool, it includes many references and an easy to use index.

Pages: **296** Price: **\$34.95** ISBN: **0-8204-5772-8**

Reviewed by Adelaide Phelps, MLIS, Director of the Educational Resources Lab at Oakland University



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