




# education review // reseñas educativas

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## Brief reviews for July 2005

**Braunger, Jane; Donahue, David M.; Evans, Kate & Galguera, Tomás (2004). *Rethinking Preparation for Content Area Teaching: The Reading Apprenticeship Approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.**

This is a curious book, addressing all links in the chain of literacy instruction: the reluctant adolescent readers, the underprepared teachers, and the misguided policymakers who perpetuate counterproductive systems. It does not place blame in any exclusive arena nor suggest any simple technical solution—common pitfalls of books that manage to contradict their own advice to teach meaningfully and collaboratively. In its quiet way this book weaves together several threads of the current educational reform rhetoric: 1) literacy is not at the levels we wish; 2) adolescents with literacy problems are late to the table and hard to teach anyway; 3) some techniques seem to work better than others but the circumstances are complex; 4) teachers can make a difference but they have problems, too, primarily, that of 5) not being knowledgeable and skilled about the previous four. The fifth point expands the conversation to include everyone with a voice in how teachers develop professionally, beginning with their preparation for certification.

The issue of exactly what and how to teach teachers what and how to teach is the focus of *Rethinking Preparation for Content Area Teaching: The Reading Apprenticeship Approach*. This approach is part of the Strategic Literacy Institute housed in WestEd, a descendent of the now defunct regional educational laboratories. Unencumbered by university policies for approving coursework and awarding credit, these entrepreneurial agencies respond to a growing market for 'ways that work.' The Reading Apprenticeship Approach is one such trademarked product (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 1999). It is a common sense approach based on whole language and learner-centered 'best practices'. Dewey (1938) would be pleased with its emphasis on child study. Because the costs of the program as designed rest in the administration of standardized tests with various scoring and reporting procedure options, it is an assessment system as well as an instructional technique. This volume is in support of teaching the technique.

This is a curriculum and instruction book, not for teachers but for their professors— that alone is noteworthy, given the very small market—and for considering the larger context in which schools function. It is a thoughtful tour of the interdependent roles of all people concerned with literacy. It may be used to persuade whole schools to reconsider adopting the trademark literacy instruction model promoted therein, or at least to question its antithesis, 'drill and kill' transmission of technical skills without meaningful engagement. It provides an indirect route to survival for Schools of Education currently beleaguered by demands for proof that they are worth the tuition they charge. It does so by offering a framework of anecdotal and theoretical support for the ideology commonly held by teacher educators that in turn drives the political wedge between them and the reform mentality seeking accountability for narrower goals.

As a professor of education, I found this most appealing about the book: the echo effect. The teacher candidates themselves must experience the approach, and it is certainly in stark contrast to the traditional university lecture with competition for high stakes grades. It is also a brave voice of practical reason in the face of challenges to teacher education programs to reduce requirements and

speed the process of providing teachers. Perhaps its explanation of adolescents' problems with coping can be generalized to the sad fact that new teachers tend to leave the profession in alarming numbers, creating a hemorrhage affecting the most vulnerable schoolchildren. These are the classrooms staffed by the least qualified, and the least likely to remain in the profession, so these are the schools with least stability. The appeal of the Reading Apprenticeship Approach is that it hopes to foster an enduring set of habits that the participants will be able to use in every context. It is therefore indeed a promising model for all content areas, and is a genuinely 'content area teaching' strategy rather than a 'content area reading' technique.

As one teaching a content area reading course, I am buoyed by this book, and at the same time appalled. It does what a book intending to inspire educators does best: it makes me think I can practice what I preach, and provides some practical and manageable steps to do so. The chapter on evaluating programs is helpful, providing language for criteria for the "unit assessment system" of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) documentation. However, much of it reads like the instructor support materials typically provided for free with textbooks: suggested projects are framed in easy-to-locate boxes. Having written such support materials myself, I know they are geared toward the underprepared beginning instructor lacking depth of background and lacking confidence in the professorial role, similar to the teacher educator addressing preservice teachers who are lacking depth and confidence. Just as the Reading Apprenticeship Approach responded to the needs of struggling adolescents in an impersonal classroom, this application of it responds to the needs of struggling preservice teachers.

Ultimately, it is written for the educated educator who is nonetheless not well-oriented to the depth, complexity, and universality of literacy. There is not a single page of stilted scholarly prose, and the few works cited tend to be practitioner-oriented from publishers such as Jossey-Bass, Christopher-Gordon, and Heinemann. Schools of Education are notorious for using inexpensive adjunct faculty, on the strength of their practitioner expertise, who are not engaged in the decisions or even aware of the ramifications of administering integrated programs. Their own instructional skill is expected to extend their proven mastery in the K-12 classroom, with little explicit training in the teaching of adults. Thus, this entire book offers helpful hints for overcoming a problem that has not been acknowledged: the preparation and support of new teacher educators who are offering preparation and support of new teachers.

## References

Dewey, J. (1938) *Experience and education*. New York, The Macmillan company.

Schoenbach, R., Greenleaf, C., Cziko, C., & Hurwitz, L. (1999). *Reading for understanding: A guide to improving reading in middle and high school classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Pages: 228 Price: \$32.00 ISBN: 0-7879-7166-9

**Reviewed by Naomi Jeffery Petersen, Ed.D., Assistant Professor of Education at Indiana University South Bend. She teaches curriculum and instruction. Her scholarly interests include assessment literacy as well as the study of adjunct faculty involvement in schools of education.**

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**Burns, Edward (2004). *The Special Education Consultant Teacher: Enabling Children with Disabilities to be Educated with Nondisabled Children to the Maximum Extent Possible*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.**

*The Special Education Consultant Teacher* provides a practical overview of the special education consultant teacher's multi-faceted role. Information is presented in seven major units, ranging from topics such as planning to direct services, enhanced by a chapter focusing on essential skills for consultant teachers.

As a special education teacher and guidance counsellor preparing to take on the role of special education teacher consultant, I was especially intrigued with what Burns's book would have to offer within what I correctly expected to be a general introduction to this role. To an educator outside the US, its greatest shortcomings for an international audience is not only its focus on American special education law, which would be a strength for a US-based educator, but also the missing detail in its title and preface that would inform its readers of this particular focus. The reader, unfortunately, is left to infer that this book is focused on a particular nation. The only major suggestion I would have is to

inform the audience of this prior to purchase, perhaps as some part of its already detailed subtitle. One example of this issue is “Essential IEP facts for the consultant teacher” (p.61). While I have no doubt of its utility for the US-based consultant teacher, it certainly does not fit special education policy in my region. On the other hand, the inclusion of such information can also be illuminating; for example, I find the list of related services a child with special needs is potentially entitled to quite happily staggering. Conversely helpful for US special education consultant teachers, Burns carefully weaves in vignettes related to specific state practices and special education court cases.

Information about education and certification requirements, and specific details and examples defining “consultant teacher” is timely, basic and practical information for the beginning or potential special education consultant teacher (p.41). An interesting juxtaposition to this topic is “Reasons for not becoming a special education teacher” (p.287) which inverts the role of the special education consultant teacher and provides the reader with personal characteristics which Burns believes would contra-indicate taking on such a position. One example is: “If you don’t like problem solving, you will not like the job of consultant teacher” (p.288).

“The people business” (p.101) provides an intuitive introduction to working with others, or people skills, and reminds the reader that the goal of the consulting teacher is “to enable children with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate” (p.101). This emphasis replaces the idea that the consultant teacher should simply make demands, provide perhaps undesired advice, or give a particular service; after all, the ultimate goal here is “not to be needed” (p.212). I further appreciate the book’s perspective and emphasis on special education as a service, rather than a particular place, and while it focuses on inclusion, it also acknowledges the understanding that full inclusion is not always possible. Burns provides a strong, detailed discussion on the true meaning and determination of “least restrictive environment,” an important premise in this book. Another central emphasis is that of the general curriculum. The author rightly insists that the special education consultant teacher should have knowledge of the general curriculum, simultaneously respecting the key expertise of the general educator in the general or regular classroom and curriculum. Burns also stresses the importance of listening to – and supporting – the classroom teacher for many reasons, one of which is that teacher’s influence on the success of inclusion.

Scattered throughout *The Special Education Consultant Teacher* are helpful numbered lists outlining major points. At times, though, the reader may wonder about the origins of these lists and their various emphases. For example, Burns lists “Ten essential consultant teacher skills” (p.16) but I am left wondering if this is a research-based piece, or if it has emerged from a policy document, or perhaps the author’s personal experience. An especially helpful structural cue is the use of visuals. One well-done group of visuals is the quadrant cubes (p.19) representing comparisons between indirect and direct services, and regular and special education and curriculum. A further area of interest is Burns’s list of five-minute skills (p.55) and one-minute skills (p.299) covering topics ranging from supervision to participation. Links to internet-based information (p.46) are also provided, a useful source as long as book editions reflect updated references and with the caveat that the reader is assuming that these are credible sources approved by the author’s expertise in the subject matter.

Section VII, “Consultant teacher essentials” is where the heart and hands of this book lies; yet, it would not be possible without the essential, yet somewhat repetitious, background information found in the preceding chapters. The “essentials” chapter transverses topics from parents and paraprofessionals to resource rooms and transition plans. For novice special education teacher consultants searching for an overview of their role or service provision, a careful read of the final section is a definite must, along with a careful review of all units that provide a detailed overview of the role of the special education consultant teacher.

Pages: 320 Price: \$67.95(hardcover), \$45.95(paper) ISBN: 0-398-07510-7(hardcover), 0-398-07511-5(paper)

**Reviewed by Kimberly Maich, a Ph.D. candidate at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. For the past seven years, she has worked as a special educator in Newfoundland, and has recently accepted a position as a school support program coordinator in Ontario. She has three children aged 13, 11 and 9, including a son with special needs.**

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**Carr, Eileen; Aldinger, Loviah & Patberg, Judythe (2004). *Teaching Comprehension: A Systematic and Practical Framework With Lessons and Strategies*. New York: Scholastic Teaching Resources.**

As an elementary school teacher, finding resources that help me ensure student success is imperative. With a busy schedule—like most teachers I know—I have little time to read practitioner-oriented books, so I look for those with several qualities: easy-to-implement strategies; research that backs up the suggestions given; and straightforward readability. In *Teaching Comprehension*, I found all three.

One of the first priorities in my reading instruction is comprehension. While many students appear to be proficient readers, how do I, as a teacher, know that they actually understand what they read? The authors of *Teaching Comprehension* offer numerous research-based strategies for teaching students to understand text and then use what they have learned.

Even better, these strategies are adaptable to fit a range of students in grades K through 6. At first, it seems implausible that the authors could explain a number of teaching methods for seven different grade levels in just under 300 pages. But the writers use adjustable techniques and manage to address the needs of students at nearly every level. The "Semantic Map" or the "Literary Report Card" can be used by students across the spectrum of reading abilities. In a time where differentiation is increasingly popular, these flexible techniques facilitate easier teacher-planning.

With many teacher resource books, the authors provide a bag of tricks without backing up their suggestions with lessons learned from educational research. In *Teaching Comprehension*, however, the authors go to great lengths to explain how their plans are supported by research. When parents—or administrators—ask why students are making Circle Stories or Story Pyramids (which both look quite artistic), the authors provide simple, direct explanations for how the techniques support students as they become better readers.

Finally, I appreciate the book's clear-cut setup and writing. The best feature of the book, however, is the CD-ROM that accompanies it. Instead of searching through paper files to find a copy of a graphic organizer, I find it much simpler to keep the CD-ROM, which contains 85 worksheets, on hand.

Pages: **288** Price: **\$27.99** ISBN: **0439531357**

**Reviewed by Katie Wester Neal. She recently completed a Master's in Education at the University of Pennsylvania and will be teaching fifth grade in Loudon County, Virginia, in the coming school year**

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### **Chu, Godwin C. & Schramm, Wilbur (2004). *Learning From Television: What the Research Says*. Greenwich, Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.**

This title is a revised edition, part of the Information Age Publishing company's effort to make available "the classic" publications from research professionals in the instructional technology field. Though the copyright of this revised edition is 2004, the work by authors Chu and Schramm reprinted here was originally published in 1967. The edition is only refreshed with an introduction and briefly glossed research update on the authors' work written by Monty C. Stanford, communications researcher at the University of Southern California.

Stanford immediately characterizes his intent to identify the newest or emerging trends in the research on instructional technology since Chu and Schramm's 1967 endeavor. Stanford concludes that there are a couple of effectually important major developments that have spring boarded from the generalizations of Chu and Schramm. For example, better, more focused research questions for further study in this field should be and could be developed and then a better procedural understanding of the "how to" component of producing effective instructional television could be created. Yet, in this publication, these issues are still addressed futuristically.

There are three new relevant generalizations, according to Stanford, that extend the work of Chu and Schramm: supplementary activities and/or interactions with adults significantly increase the effectiveness of instructional television for young children, aged preschool and early elementary; certain production techniques enhance the learning of this same age group; formative research is needed to further examine and use findings to construct more effective instructional television.

Each point offers new scholars avenues to explore. The first point, adult interactions increase effectiveness of instructional television, was based on a series of popular television shows including "Sesame Street". Chu and Schramm concluded in their first report that children, whose parents watched the program with them, learned more from the program. Current research agrees that this

conclusion is still relevant, but as Stanford comments, "Instructional television itself, even Sesame Street, is not a complete instructional system in and of itself"(pg. iv). In 1967, Chu and Schramm were careful to clarify that their work was largely based upon comparative analysis of conventional instruction and with "assumed or accepted standard" delivery of conventional instruction. It seems that in order to refresh this idea, Stanford either needs to make the case that the definition of instructional television has not changed at all or that it needs to change and evolve to include a set of systematic qualifications of what is instructional.

The second point, about production techniques in 1967 provided some clues but no significant, documented findings that certain techniques enhanced learning. In their first report, the two authors concluded that dramatization, humor, animation or even colorization of television programs did not significantly enhance learning. Stanford updates this generalization based on the consistent research conducted on such programs as "Sesame Street" and "Carrascolendas", a Spanish-English television program, which refute the earlier findings. The humor, songs, and games used by these two programs in particular have been found to help students better remember the lessons when these methods were utilized.

The third point calling for the need of more formative research in the instructional television field is perhaps the best opportunity for growth in the spirit of inquiry of any new educational researcher. The formative research process would have given Chu and Schramm more to examine and more concrete evidence in support of instructional television as an appropriate and effective tool in education.

The formative research process could provide a myriad of invaluable information to all involved. Teachers and production staff could have research-based information to better develop instructional television shows, useful in the pilot or test-group and rewriting phases of production. Likewise, such research could provide other delivery- centered solutions including, why and exactly what methods of instructional television delivery are most effective in a given setting and to what groups or for what kind of instructional topic does a certain medium work best.

Stanford also interjects the notion of instructional radio and its effectiveness. This subject was treated by Chu and Schramm as the "other" medium in their previous research. Stanford reiterates that to date there is no significant increase in the research on instructional radio. Instructional radio is still a relevant medium for the three main reasons originally stated by the two authors: students can learn from any instructional media available in favorable situations; visual images supplement audible images in the associative process and can enhance learning; student response is controlled by programmed methods regardless of instructional medium.

This edition provides a broad, historical research-based context for the effectiveness of instructional television and "other mediums" such as radio. The introduction only refreshes the research of Chu and Schramm in a more curious, but still broadly generalized, way for readers. There is room to look at the different instructional mediums currently being used including web-based and other interactive modes, another opportunity for formative research exploration.

The content of the old Chu and Schramm provides a road map for emerging educational researchers and even technological researchers to construct what Stanford calls a "formative research model to enable more effective and more cost-effective program production and policy making at all levels, from local to national education" (pg ix). Or what Chu and Schramm called, "The questions worth asking are no longer whether students learn from it, but rather, (1) does the situation call for it? And (2) how, in a given situation, can it be used effectively" (p. 98)?

Pages: **275** Price: **\$25.95** ISBN: **1-59311-141-X**

**Reviewed by Letitia V. Fowler, MA, Michigan State University. Letitia is a graduate of Central Michigan University with a Masters degree in English Language and Literature. She currently works as the Communications Assistant to the President at Michigan State University.**

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**Davidson, Bob; Davidson, Jan & Vanderkam, Laura (2004). *Genius Denied: How to Stop Wasting Our Brightest Young Minds*. New York: Simon & Schuster.**

In an era of "No Child Left Behind" have we created an environment in which teachers can no longer afford to take the time in allowing highly capable students the freedom to move ahead? Educators, parents and, most importantly, gifted students are growing increasingly frustrated with the state of gifted education in our schools as programs for the gifted are being cut to meet the demands of raising

the floor instead of the ceiling. As a Talented and Gifted Specialist who would like to see a rise in both the ceiling AND the floor, I am always looking for books to share with parents and fellow educators that I believe can help them look at gifted education through a new or perhaps fresh lens. *Genius Denied* happens to be exactly one of those books.

Jan and Bob Davidson, are successful business entrepreneurs who sold their software company and became philanthropists with a particular heart and interest for gifted children. *Genius Denied* reflects on the encounters they have had with families and educators of gifted children through their foundation, the Davidson Institute for Talent Development.

This book is presented in three parts: chapters addressing issues such as the state of gifted education, parenting, what schools can do, and the importance of mentors and advocacy; an extensive notes and bibliography section; and a "how to" section for parents, students, educators and policy makers. While I found the "notes" section cumbersome, as I was reading the chapters and wanting reference information, it is very thorough and worthy of its own investigative look for a reader interested in learning more about the studies mentioned in the text.

Throughout the book the authors address acceleration, grade skipping, enrichment, early college entry, differentiation and homeschooling as a few of the many options possible for gifted students. These options are addressed because of the authors' frustration with the lack of challenges currently offered by the school systems in the United States for our highly capable students. Through short vignettes these issues are personalized to children and their families and the struggles that ensued as they tried to overcome the failure of schools to meet the needs of these particular students. The dedication of parents and teachers as well as sacrifices of families is highlighted as instrumental investments into these students.

A unique feature of this book which I found refreshing was that the concentration was not on the failure of the schools, but on giving examples of what does work and how an educator, parent, student, or community member can make a difference for the betterment of gifted education. Both public and private schools are examined, so the brunt of the frustration is not pushed solely onto the public schools. The authors are very quick to say that most teachers are doing their best with what they have in regards to their lack of training in differentiation and understanding of this particular population of kids. The success stories presented are "real" and I point that out to the reader because it is very clear the hard work and dedication that were necessary to be able to present a success story in some of the situations profiled.

The authors also address the "No Child Left Behind" legislation and how devastating an impact this policy has had on gifted education. Several schools have now eliminated programs for the gifted to fund the other end of the spectrum of learners instead of making investments into gifted programs or magnet schools that have been proven particularly helpful for students' future successes and contributions to society. Several programs of this nature are featured in the text with practical information on replicating curriculum or strategies that have been found successful.

The section on "What You can Do" is sandwiched in-between the chapters and notes sections, but should be read in its entirety and shared with everyone who works with, parents or knows a gifted child. I found many items in this section that I passed on immediately to colleagues and parents, and I also have included many items into lessons that I will be teaching next year. I was particularly fond of the inclusion of policy makers and patrons/mentors in this section, because it was an affirmation that educating our gifted students goes beyond the walls of our schools and homes—it includes the community.

*Genius Denied* is a practical book that I believe is helpful in understanding issues surrounding gifted education and gifted children, but probably the biggest asset that this book has to offer is its companion website ( <http://www.GeniusDenied.com> ). This website has a wealth of information for everyone interested in gifted education. There are sections for students, parents, educators, mentors, and patrons as well as an extensive library of resources that can easily be downloaded. In addition readers will find a section on policy that is helpful for understanding and examining information from the national to the individual state level. There is also a current "in the news" section that is helpful. This website parallels what is discussed and examined in the book with greater depth because of the empirical studies that are available at the click of a mouse.

I would recommend *Genius Denied* to any parent or colleague who is willing to move beyond concentrating on what is not being done and into a mind set that, even though we struggle with funding and time constraints, a community working together with the resources they have can make a

difference in the education of America's brightest young minds.

Pages: 242 Price: \$24.00 ISBN: 0-7432-5460-0

**Reviewed by Keely S. Porter, a doctoral student in Educational Leadership—Curriculum and Instruction at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. She is also a Talented and Gifted Specialist at Edward Byrom Elementary School in Tualatin, Oregon.**

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**Drapeau, Patti (2004). *Differentiated Instruction: Making It Work: A Practical Guide to Planning, Managing, and Implementing Differentiated Instruction to Meet the Needs of All Learners*. New York: Scholastic.**

If you have not heard of differentiated instruction or you have dismissed the concept because you think it is just another name for tracking or leveling students, you should read this book. The author does an effective job of describing differentiated instruction. She supports the worth of the educational technique by supplying the reader with studies on brain and intelligence research. She also provides concrete examples of differentiated instruction as used in her classroom and guidance for teachers who wish to implement it into their own classrooms.

The book is intended for classroom teachers of grades three through six. The following chapters are included:

- Differentiation: What It Is (And What It Is Not)
- Content Enrichment
- Instructional Tools
- Differential Learning Centers
- Another Angle on Differentiation

The first chapter of the book defines differentiated instruction in a unique way. The author not only describes what differentiated instruction is, she also explains what it is not. In doing so, she dispels any misconceptions that may cause confusion or hinder full understanding of the concept and how it can be used to meet the needs of the individual student. As the writer so aptly states, "Clearly, differentiated instruction can be a loaded term when misunderstood in theory or misconstrued in practice" (p. 11).

Differentiated instruction is not just a way of leveling students, she explains. It is a system of tiers that "challenge students at the appropriate level of instruction" (p. 11). It is a way of modifying curriculum objectives and responding to student needs. It is also a way of helping students with different styles of learning to find their strengths. The writer describes six types of learners—academic, perfectionist, creative, struggling, invisible, and high-energy (p. 18-22). She addresses each type and offers guidance on how differentiated instruction can be used to maximize the learner's strengths.

Perhaps the most critical point the writer makes is that differential instruction is absolutely reliant upon continual assessment of student needs and achievement (p. 24). The point is first made in chapter one and reiterated through the rest of the book. The writer emphasizes the point by showing how assessment is used in designing activities that challenge the student to work at a maximum level without feeling overwhelmed. Each chapter offers example assessment techniques as they relate to the activities presented in the book.

Differentiated instruction is supported by brain and intelligence research. The author includes studies conducted by Lev Vygotsky on the Zone of Proximal Development, Eric Jensen on the effect of challenge on the brain, Robert Sternberg on successful intelligence, and Howard Gardner on Multiple Intelligences. These studies confirm the need for teachers to incorporate appropriate, challenging, and meaningful learning activities into school curriculum (p. 12-16). They also offer teachers a starting point for further research that will help them as they sculpt differential instruction into a form that will work for them and their students.

In the second chapter, the writer describes tiered instruction, a technique of designing instruction that uses "critical-thinking skills prompts, probes, questions, and activities that challenge students to push more deeply" into the material (p. 34). She demonstrates how tiered instruction can be implemented into the classroom through content enrichment. Her writings on the design of tiered questions are particularly helpful in highlighting the usefulness of the technique. They show that purposely including

analytical questions can produce higher-level thinking (p. 39). “All students can do higher-level thinking if it is matched up with the level of content that they are able to handle” (p. 36).

The chapters of the book that I feel are the most helpful for the teacher who wishes to implement differentiated instruction into the classroom are chapters three and four. They provide a solid foundation for getting started. They also provide a springboard for custom designing differentiated instruction programs. The chapters contain instructional tools the teacher can use in the classroom. The tools are suitable for a variety of subjects, making them adaptable across the curriculum. Chapter three includes a detailed look at five strategies for differential instruction—directed questioning, game formats, graphic organizers, Questioning Sheets, and task cards (p. 55). Chapter four contains examples of differentiated learning centers. The writers includes helpful information about how often to use learning centers, warning that although students find centers exciting in the beginning, they become uninterested if there is not enough variety.

The final chapter in the book describes differentiated instruction as a tool for acceleration. Although I found the information included within the chapter to be interesting, I did not feel it was as helpful for the average fourth through six grade classroom. As a previous fourth grade teacher, I feel most of my former students would have benefited more from differentiated instruction through enrichment rather than acceleration. However, for the seasoned teacher who has been successful in implementing differentiated instruction opportunities as enrichment, acceleration is a logical next step.

*Differentiated Instruction: Making It Work* is an effective tool for introducing teachers to differentiated instruction. It is geared toward the appropriate audience—the practicing teacher. It offers helpful material for implementation and provides a launching pad for further growth. The book left me with a positive feeling. Sometimes I read books and think the concept described sounds good in theory but would be too difficult for an overloaded classroom teacher to fit into the day. I do not feel that way about this book. I feel that the information presented could be successfully used in the classroom.

Pages: 144 Price: \$19.99 ISBN: 0439517788

**Reviewed by Kathy Seibold, Coordinator of Distance Education at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She has a Master’s degree in Library and Information Studies from the University of Oklahoma and is working toward a Doctorate of Education in Higher Education from Oklahoma State University.**

**Routman, Regie (2005). *Writing Essentials: Raising Expectations and Results While Simplifying Teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

How does an elementary teacher make writing fun, high quality, authentic, and holistic, while at the same time keeping in mind the state and district standards? In *Writing Essentials* Regie Routman clearly describes and designs ways to integrate all the above key components of effective writing in an easy, enjoyable, and useful book accompanied by a DVD. This book is written for teachers by a teacher. Routman explicitly teaches how her writing beliefs work in a classroom by using real teaching experiences to demonstrate what her proposed model would look like. There are “teaching tips” in sidebars throughout the book to troubleshoot foreseeable problems. They also give helpful ideas about the concepts addressed. The book includes easy to use lesson plans and examples from authentic student work. The goal is to have students and teachers become motivated, confident writers who see writing as an every day, useful, and enjoyable tool (p. 4). This book is a practical and useful resource for elementary teachers.

*Writing Essentials* is written with the reader in mind. It is designed like a lesson plan and it takes the reader on a journey as if the reader is the student and Routman the teacher. Routman constantly connects the text from chapter to chapter to model how writing is interconnected. Her beliefs are grounded in what she calls the “Optimal Learning Model Across the Curriculum” (inside cover). This is the gradual release of responsibility moving from dependence to independence of the learner.

Part One focuses on the framework of what makes effective writers. It suggests the need to simplify writing and focus on the school’s beliefs. Included is a helpful questionnaire designed for a staff to discover where their school’s writing beliefs are grounded. It then outlines the “12 writing essentials for all grade levels” (p. 13) and emphasizes celebrating students and teachers as writers. Routman advocates promoting positive self esteem and self image for students concerned with their writing. She discusses the importance of the teacher modeling the value and process of writing and modeling



how it applies to the teacher's real life thus creating authenticity and purpose for his or her students.

Part Two focuses on how to teach the beliefs presented in Part One. The author clearly explains how to raise the expectations for students as writers by focusing on quality rather than quantity and gives guidelines as to what a teacher should expect from his/her students as final quality work. She even gives an example of a letter to send home to communicate this heightened expectation to parents. Routman then advocates the importance of shared writing. At the end of chapter 5 she gives many great classroom activities to include shared writing in a meaningful way such as creating welcome letters and poems. Routman feels it is important to "capitalize on the reading-writing connection" (p. 119) not only to use reading as an example of good writing, but also to connect writing as thinking about reading.

Part Three describes what writing should look like in a classroom. It recommends that educators start with a year long plan and look at writing in its holistic nature and by genre and not as parts leading up to a whole. It recommends looking for ways to authentically interject writing into every discipline. Routman details how to have effective conferences with students about their writing, conferences that are meaningful and build self esteem. She suggests not all conferences need to be one-on-one with the teacher, but can be in small groups and even whole class. This segues into a discussion of meaningful assessments. She explains the use of rubrics as helpful guides, but cautions teachers not to look at them in isolation. She recommends using rubrics as "an evaluation tool, not as the driving instructional force" (p. 243). The discussion includes an example of more child friendly rubrics hence more usable and valuable to students (p. 241).

Part Four is titled "Advocacy is Also Essential." Here Routman impresses that teachers need to have a voice in the way they are teaching writing. She cites some of the most recent key research findings in the field of writing to support teachers to advocate for best practices in writing. She states, "while there is no one best program or model of how to teach writing, knowledgeable teachers make decisions based on research, teaching and learning experiences, their observations of their students, and ongoing professional conversations" (p. 267). She advocates for the school having a "schoolwide vision" (p. 274) of writing and gives some useful guidelines to facilitate these discussions. Lastly, Routman urges teachers to make their time count, every minute; to eliminate time wasting worksheets, to spend their time reading valuable resources, and to take time to relax. "One way to reduce stress and have more energy for teaching and advocacy is to have a life outside of school" (p. 287).

The conclusion of the book is the most practical section for a teacher. It includes 5 developed lesson plans, parent letters, rubrics, expectation guidelines, masters to help aid in the writing process for students and teachers, and notes to guide users viewing the included DVD.

*Writing Essentials* is an extremely helpful resource for all teachers, particularly for those using a writer's workshop format. It is also very useful for those who want to improve the writing experience for their students. This book and its message can only help to increase student's writing, self esteem, and to help create better writers.

Pages: **350** Price: **\$32.00** ISBN: **0-325-00601-6**

**Reviewed by Danielle Werts, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher in Milwaukie, Oregon and a graduate student at Portland State University.**

**Sax, Leonard (2005). *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know About the Emerging Science of Sex Differences*. New York: Doubleday.**

In *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know about the Emerging Science of Sex Differences*, psychologist and family physician, Dr. Leonard Sax, challenges the assertion that characteristics associated with each gender have been socially constructed. Using a scientific approach, along with research from the past two decades, Sax argues that gender differences are biologically programmed. Sax asserts "that for the past three decades, the influence of social and cognitive factors on gender traits has been systematically over estimated while innate factors have been neglected" (p. 253). The author further suggests that ignoring these hardwired gender differences, and opting for a gender-neutral child-rearing philosophy, "has done substantial harm over the past thirty years" (p. 7). As an example, he calls to attention the increased number of boys being given behavior-modifying drugs, and the increased number of girls being given antidepressants.

Sax stresses that although it is important to chip away at gender stereotypes, we should also recognize variances in how girls and boys develop. By understanding the unique qualities of each gender, we can better accommodate the different needs of boys and girls, with regard to the way they are raised, disciplined and educated. Sax suggests that single-sex education may help accommodate these gender differences. However, he does not believe that single-sex education is the only solution. He states that, "For at least some children in some circumstances, single sex activities offer unique opportunities and may even serve to 'inoculate' girls and boys against some of the societal ailments that now threaten children and teenagers" (p. 9). He writes, "Coed schools tend to *reinforce* gender stereotypes, where as single-sex schools can *break down* gender stereotypes" (p. 243).

Sax convincingly argues that there are biological gender differences in the ways in which boys and girls develop, think, feel and act. Girls are better at tasks involving object discrimination. Boys, on the other hand, are better at tasks involving object location and motion. He also refers to studies showing that boys tend toward drawing verbs: a rocket hitting its target, an alien about to eat somebody, a car about to hit another car. Girls, on the other hand, tend toward drawing nouns: people, pets, flowers or trees. In addition, on a biological level, boys and girls process negative and positive emotions differently. Unlike with girls, the part of the boys' brain where emotions happen is not well connected to the part of the brain where verbal processing and speech happens. This makes it difficult for boys to communicate their feelings.

Sax also covers the differences between males and females when it comes to risks, asserting that boys and girls assess and experience risk differently. Girls tend to be more cautious and report feeling fearful in risky situations; whereas, boys tend to be less cautious, and more likely to feel exhilarated by risky situations. In his book, Sax also explores the differences between how girls and boys react to aggression and pain. Boys fight physically, and more often. The wins generally raise their standing among the other boys and can foster stronger relationships with their peers. Girls, on the other hand, fight less often and typically fight with words. These fights can have lasting repercussions—negative feelings linger and friendships may end.

To implicate biology with respect to gender differences, Sax provides research on other mammals, specifically chimpanzees, which are evolutionarily linked to humans. In doing so, Sax explains the origins and original importance of these gender differences. For example, aggression in male chimpanzees has served biological purposes—killing prey and teaching others "the rules of the game" (p. 62). Whereas, female primates are more likely to engage in *alloparenting*, looking after other baby monkeys.

Throughout *Why Gender Matters*, Sax attempts to illustrate how gender differences become manifest in schools, sex, drugs, discipline and sexual orientation. Sax also provides some strategies and suggestions on more effective ways to interact with males and females. Where Sax wanes—in terms of being convincing and uncompromised—is when he veers off to address social constructivism. For example, in his discipline chapter, Sax devotes considerable attention to discussing "the *transfer of authority from parent to the child*" (p. 166). This is an interesting issue; however, in the context of discussing whether or not gender differences are innate or procured, the subject of transference of authority seemed too much of a segue.

Sax also makes some bold statements that he does not support with evidence. For example, he says that, "educators throughout North America make no apologies for the academic character of the twenty-first century kindergarten" (p. 94). In this comment he is referring to the push to achieve higher academic success at the expense of socialization and motor skills. As an educator, I know this to be an inaccurate statement; within the teaching community the concern runs deep.

Despite these weaknesses, Sax makes an excellent case for emphasizing that gender differences should not be used to reinforce gender stereotypes, at the expense of one sex over the other, nor should these differences be ignored for the sake of homogenization. Sax states, "The differences between what girls and boys can do are not large. But the differences in how they do it can be very large indeed" (p. 32-33).

In education we are in search of ways to make sure that we are being effective teachers and counselors. We try to provide equitable education for all students. *Why Gender Matters* makes some interesting points about gender for educators to consider. For one, have educators in their effort to be equitable to boys and girls become too gender-blind? Sax claims, "The education establishment has erased any gender distinctions in the curriculum" (p. 235). I cannot fully embrace this statement, because I think that, more often than not, the education establishment is in the hands of the political establishment. And the political establishment deems academic prowess far more important than the

social development of students. However, I think *Why Gender Matters* provides a sound basis for encouraging educators to examine school policy and their current teaching strategies. One of Sax's most interesting arguments has to do with the health of our society, by implying that tempering gender leanings, such as boys' engagement in rough-and-tumble play, may in fact result in the unhealthy and violent explosion of suppressed aggression.

I would encourage all educators to read this book so a discussion could develop regarding these important gender issues.

Pages: 312 Price: \$24.95 ISBN: 0-385-51073-X

**Reviewed by Stephanie Trudeau, a counseling student in the Counselor Education Master's Program at Adams State College.**

**Shaywitz, Sally (2003). *Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level*. New York: Knopf/Random House.**

In my eighteen years as a reading specialist, each school year brought with it one reoccurring problem. As I formed the curves of a letter on the chalkboard and discussed the letter's sound, as I then used those letters to form words followed by sentences of ever increasing lengths, I always found a handful of students who simply did not "get it." They excelled in math. They were bright. They were diligent. But each year, I stared into several pairs of confounded eyes coupled with the bewildered wrinkling of little foreheads.

When it came to reading, each day was a brand new day for these students, often more of a tribulation than the day before. For these students, words may as well have been road signs that they didn't understand – nothing more than a jumbled concoction of shapes, curves, and lines. These students didn't get it. They didn't understand their reading disability, and neither did I. Much like these students, I saw the signs, but I didn't truly understand the origin of their reading problems. Sally Shaywitz gets it, and in her book *Overcoming Dyslexia*, she lifts the complex cloak of this disorder that has clouded the understanding of students, parents, and teachers alike for decades.

Shaywitz's text is a step-by-step guide that leads the reader through the medical and scientific aspects of the disorder, to its emotional and learning ramifications for students, to learning activities – from mystification to enlightenment and then, perhaps most importantly, to hope. As the author's main premise asserts, "The greatest stumbling block preventing a dyslexic child from realizing his potential and following his dreams is the widespread ignorance about the true nature of dyslexia" (p. 89). Shaywitz tackles this ignorance in part one of her four-part book as she delves deeply into the medical discoveries. In this first section, *The Nature of Reading and Dyslexia*, Shaywitz discusses the use of MRIs, the same scanner used to evaluate torn knee ligaments, to allow scientists to watch and record the brain as a person reads.

"Reading is a code, and no matter who we are, each of us must somehow represent print as a neural code that the brain can decipher. Functional imaging (MRI) makes this process transparent, allowing scientists to watch (and record) the neural systems at work as they attempt to transcribe letters into sounds. For most people this process is incredibly quick, smooth, and effortless. For others it's an entirely different story. Seeing these images leaves no doubt that the core problem in dyslexia is phonologic: turning print into sound. Only when dyslexic readers are asked to map letters into sounds do we see evidence of a fault in the circuitry" (p.87).

I found Shaywitz's medical explanation of what she dubbed as a simple fault in circuitry to be exciting and almost relieving. It seemed to me a map, an actual diagram of what occurs in the brain of every dyslexic child and adult. The material she presents within the first six chapters that comprise part one of the book may be bogged down with scientific jargon and medical complexity at times, but brain illustrations and diagrams provide a substantial life preserver for readers swimming in scientific terminology. In a book aimed at dispelling the ignorance that has plagued a true understanding of the disorder for so long, such a deep sea of scientific explanation is a necessary evil.

Part two, *Diagnosing Dyslexia*, covers topics ranging from identifying at-risk children to diagnosis of dyslexia in the school-aged child. This section equips teachers, specialists and parents with everything they would need for accurate diagnosis, from delayed speech to family histories, in a comprehensive guide to the tell-tale signs of this disorder. Shaywitz's outline of specific problems to look for in children ranging from those in preschool to those who have already reached adulthood would

prove valuable to any teacher or parent.

The final two parts of this text were most inspiring and encouraging. Shaywitz moves effortlessly from the hard scientific facts to the emotional implications of dyslexia. She demystifies the art of learning to read without buying expensive programs. The practical, explicit activities include games and an extensive list of books that encompasses everything from poetry to pattern books, where “cat-in-the-hat” type repetition teaches students to truly connect with language and the written word. And perhaps most impressive is Shaywitz’s chapter titled *Protecting and Nourishing Your Child’s Soul*, which supplies teachers and parents with the tools needed to not only explain what dyslexia is, but also to teach children how it affects them and how you can help them.

This text gives us the tools to answer the question, “Why can’t I read like other children?” It is a question that has hovered unanswered on the lips of children in classrooms everywhere. It is because of the work of dedicated individuals such as Shaywitz that educators like me can now confidently provide that life-changing answer.

Pages: **414** Price: **\$25.95** ISBN: **0-375-40012-5**

**Reviewed by Paula L. Bjork, a graduate student at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon and a teacher/Literacy Specialist at Tualatin Elementary School in Tualatin, Oregon.**

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**Simon, Liz (2005). *Write as an Expert: Explicit Teaching of Genres*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

This title discusses a total of 10 writing genres, each with its own chapter: poetry, letter, recounting, fiction, response, report, media report, explanation, persuasion, argument/counterargument. Simon believes that for students to be confident and better writers, they need to explicitly be taught the language, structure, and purpose of the writing genres. Within the genres she provides activities for students who are early (informal, speechlike), transitional (more formal than speechlike), and extending (formal) writers. The author stresses that students need to write often and with guidance.

Each chapter begins with a “Program Chart” that includes the development framework; content covered in the chapter; text and language structures and conventions; and student activities. Each chapter ends with an “Outcomes Profile” for parents and teachers to assess students’ learning. Photos and student exemplars convince the reader that the activities have been classroom-tested.

I highly recommend this book to elementary language arts teachers. Simon has tailored her book to an audience of busy “in the trench” teachers, providing 46 ready-to-use blackline masters. I found the resource easy to read and written in an enthusiastic tone. It is a treasure trove of activities that teachers can instantly use. An extensive bibliography is included for further reading.

Pages: **178** Price: **\$20.00** ISBN: **0-325-00685-7**

**Reviewed by Louis Lim, PhD student, Faculty of Education, York University, Toronto, Canada**

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**Sweeney, Alyse (2004). *Teaching the Essentials of Reading with Picture Books: 15 Lessons that Use Favorite Picture Books to Teach Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Comprehension, and Vocabulary*. New York: Scholastic Teaching Resources.**

**Overview**

In *Teaching the Essentials of Reading with Picture Books*, the author asserts that empirically validated strategies for instruction in early reading skills are provided. This practice-oriented lesson book is for use in kindergarten through second grade classrooms. Concepts and strategies Sweeney presents could also easily be adapted for older learners in need of basic reading skills instruction. Situated within the context of “read-aloud” activities, Sweeney describes a variety of lessons to teach reading skills. The “five building blocks of reading”, as identified by the Reading First initiative and cited by the author provide an organizational framework for the compilation of lessons contributed by early elementary teachers with whom the author consulted.

Before presentation of lessons specific to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, several introductory ideas are provided. The author proposes using picture books for instructional purposes in addition to the more typical use focused on encouraging the “imagination of young readers” (p. 5). Other resources in the introduction include guidelines for choosing books, guidelines for using read aloud as an instructional format, and a bibliography including story books used in the lessons as well as other alternatives.

Also in introductory chapters, the author provides a useful overview of the five pillars of basic reading skills based on an adaptation of information from *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*. An easily referenced chart summarizes the descriptions of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. This guide includes an overall definition of the skill area, a description of why the skill area is important in reading development, and instructional concepts and activities related to the skill area. This chart appears particularly useful for the generation of additional instructional approaches for early reading instruction.

Five chapters follow the Introduction. Within these chapters, three detailed lessons are provided for each of the five areas. Specific skills and related areas are as follows:

- Phonemic Awareness:  
phoneme identity, segmenting onsets and rimes, phoneme manipulation
- Phonics:  
letter sounds, letter combinations, spelling patterns
- Fluency:  
phrasing and intonation, punctuation, dialogue
- Vocabulary:  
specific words and concepts, word parts, using context clues
- Comprehension:  
using graphic organizers, question-answer relationships, and summarizing.

Each lesson is presented in a standard format that includes a description of the particular reading skill, sequential instructions for lessons based on specific children’s books, possible instructional modifications, additional activities related to the skill, and a bibliography of suggested books for teaching the skill. Demonstrations of some of the lessons are provided via “lesson in action” scenarios in which specific dialogue between teacher and students is detailed. Another feature of some of the lessons is the inclusion of reproducible pages the teacher might employ while teaching the lesson. For example, a graphic organizer for story sequencing is presented for the teacher to use in guiding students to ask what happens first in a story, next, then, and how the story concludes.

### **Strengths/Weaknesses**

The author’s intention of providing a practical tool for teachers to utilize for reading instruction is supported by several features. First, clearly outlining instructional objectives, needed materials, and accommodations for a diverse classroom of learners offers active early childhood teachers a quick, realistic tool to supplement other curricular activities. The author’s own experience teaching and additional training in reading instruction strengthen the credibility of the techniques. Ideas from someone who has “been there” are generally more readily accepted by others who are currently “there.” Further, presentation of lessons being used by a variety of early elementary teachers bolsters the validity of the techniques as well. Other strengths of this lesson book include:

- the provision of general reading instructional guidelines;
- an easily understood and clearly written summary of basic reading skills identified by the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement;
- the use of teaching tips to strengthen execution of instruction; and
- a user-friendly format.

While *Teaching the Essentials of Reading with Picture Books* represents a useful tool for educators, a few details distract from its overall purpose. The author acknowledges elementary teachers who have contributed lessons; however, very limited background information is provided regarding these teachers. Also, the extent to which the ideas in the book are the author’s own ideas or those of the contributing teachers is unclear. More importantly, the degree to which the lessons are successful in supplementing reading instruction in basic skills is not provided. While the author positions the lessons within an “empirically-validated” framework, it appears that the five building blocks are the validated concepts rather than the strategies themselves. Thus, an educator utilizing this book as a resource must do so only as a supplemental approach to reading instruction. Even so, *Teaching the Essentials*

of *Reading with Picture Books* represents a unique, inherently enjoyable strategy for embedding reading instruction into a common activity in an early childhood classroom.

## References

National Institute for Literacy. (2001). *Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read*. Washington, D.C.: Partnership for Reading.

Pages: **96** Price: **\$15.99** ISBN: **0-439-53990-0**

**Reviewed by Pam Guess, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga**

## **Vuko, Evelyn Porreca (2004). *Teacher Says: 30 Foolproof Ways to Help Kids Thrive in School*. New York: Berkley Publishing Group**

Evelyn Vuko's 2004 publication *Teacher Says*, offers 30 ways in which to help kids thrive in school. An initial impression from the title might lead the reader to expect yet another mundane book concerning the many problems that teachers encounter in practice. However, a brief glance at the contents proves that this is a thoughtful and useful tool for an educator.

Seven parts make up the whole of this title. Part one covers things to think about every school year. Parts two through five cover school levels from kindergarten to high school. Part seven covers beating the summertime blues. Although this book covers a vast cognitive age span of learners, it flows naturally and is quite convenient in that educators are able to flip to the pages that cover their age group of interest quickly and easily.

Vuko's sensitivity and no-nonsense writing style makes for a comfortable and informative read. Throughout the text she reminds readers that anyone involved in any way in the learning process is a teacher, whether the person has formal training or not. There may be some who disagree with this statement. I see her as placing a huge responsibility on those persons who do not have formal training as well as those who do. Children model the behavior of parents and other adults and therefore adults are placed in the role of teacher. Educators should be aware of this fact at all times and "teach" accordingly

Vuko not only discusses traditional educational attitudes and behaviors, but also covers such topics as health, hygiene and etiquette. In today's environment, where politeness is sometimes a pleasant and unexpected surprise, it was refreshing to read this portion of the book. Educators and other responsible adults must also be aware that not all children fit in a particular educational environment and should try to find the best school or classroom setting for each student.

The book also covers study skills and reading comprehension. As many educators have encountered, some of the brightest students have weak study skills. Voku offers suggestions on how to help students strengthen their study skills. Reading comprehension, or the lack of this critical skill, is where many students fall between the cracks. I see this author as saying that it does take a village to raise a child. She reiterates that "you don't have to be a reading teacher" (p.196) to help students with reading comprehension.

This title is one to refer back to again and again. There is a plethora of ideas to use, as well as a healthy bibliographic and resource page. The latter portion of the book also has a section called the Book List for Reluctant Readers. The Tools for Teaching are also worth looking at.

Pages: **320** Price: **\$15.00** ISBN: **0-399-52997-7**

**Reviewed by Darcus D. Smith, Graduate Student, University of Oklahoma**



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