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## Brief reviews for November 2005

**Breault, Donna Adair & Breault, Rick, Editors (2005) *Experiencing Dewey: Insights for Today's Classroom*. Indianapolis: Kappa Delta Pi.**

I picked up this book intending to skim the introduction and forward, but planning to read and review the entire text later. I found myself on page 41 before I realized it. I had begun highlighting points that I agreed with, and others that I wanted to refer to in other projects. I also marked chapters that I wanted to reread critically. This is a text a person can read several times and gain new insights with subsequent readings. The chapters are not sequential so there is no danger of taking a chapter out of context.

Each of this book's forty-four chapters begins with a quote from one of Dewey's many works and continues with a contemporary author applying that quote to his or her work in the educational setting. For example, Chapter 3 begins a quote from *The school and society*; "There is very little place in the traditional schoolroom for the child to work" (p. 18). Donna Adair Breault discusses this quote from her perspective as a former second grade teacher focusing on *activities* that kept her busy preparing for the children, and kept the children busy completing them. She realized her lack of content knowledge prohibited the children from fully questioning and exploring. She admits to being the "entertainer" (p. 19), rather than the facilitator of learning. In addition, she describes a first-year teacher she observed in her later role as college professor. The novice teacher used an activity similar to one that Breault had used many years before, but with very different results.

Many of the quotes chosen are amazingly appropriate for education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, a quote from *Democracy and Education* says, "Why is it, in spite of the fact that teaching by pouring in, learning by passive absorption, are universally condemned, that they are still so entrenched in practice?" (p. 23). Dewey asked this some six decades ago, but it seems fitting to ask that question again today.

Although all the writers attempt to place their chosen quotes within the proper perspective, the editors encourage the reader to examine the original source documents for a richer understanding of the context from which the quote came. They fear a reader who is unfamiliar with Dewey, or with particular works, may develop a skewed view of his writings; therefore, they thoughtfully offer numerous references. They cite the *Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953* as well as individual sources the reader might access.

The editors arranged the chapters around five themes (Active learning, The educative experience, Critical thinking, Inquiry and education, and Democratic citizenship) for the sake of organization and have a variety of entries in each section. The entries are brief (most are 2-4 pages) and could easily serve as a discussion starter for a faculty meeting, study group, or a university graduate course. The reader may agree or disagree with a particular entry's author, but Breault and Breault claim that this is an effective way to experience Dewey, and the point of the text. In order to agree or disagree, one has to think about the ideas offered by the writer, in terms of one's own experience.

Far from being sacrilegious, the editors sought to create a sort of "daily devotional" (p.2) of John Dewey's quotes. The writers brought together by the editors included college professors, students, classroom teachers, and administrators. Some names will be unfamiliar while others are well known, but each reflects on, and writes about, the chosen quote in terms of his or her professional life.

Keep this book handy for those times when you need a common starting place for reflection in a graduate class or professional development seminar.

## References

Dewey, J., Boydston, J.A. & Hickman, L. (1996) *The collected works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*. Charlottesville, VA: IntelLex Corp.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Macmillan.

Dewey, J. (1915). *The school and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pages: 176 Price: \$20.00 ISBN: 0-912099-42-9

**Reviewed by Mary Ransdell, Ed.D, an assistant professor of elementary education at the University of Memphis in Memphis, TN. She enjoys her work with preservice teachers, both before and during their professional semester, and with those preparing for national board certification. Her professional interests include reflection by preservice teachers and the use of cooperative learning.**

**Freeman, David E. & Freeman Yvonne S. (2004) *Essential Linguistics: What You Need to Know to Teach Reading, ESL, Spelling, Phonics, and Grammar*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

David and Yvonne Freeman's *Essential Linguistics* is a road map to a more effective approach to language instruction. The scope is broad, but, at the same time, the authors are aware of the danger that can arise in writing about matters as diverse as first language acquisition and the evolution of the writing system in English. *Essential Linguistics* pulls together an array of research to challenge assumptions about how people acquire language. Conventional methods of instruction are also examined. In the end, readers are given a solid theoretical framework for an approach to language pedagogy.

The book begins with an exploration of first language acquisition. One of the most important insights offered in this section involves the claim that children do not imitate adults. Instead, children build structure. To drive home their point, the Freemans offer the following sentence, typical of a young child: "I goed home yesterday." It is unlikely that a child would have heard this sentence from an adult. Therefore, the child is not imitating what she or he hears. Instead, the child is building a language framework, in this case concerning the creation of past tense verbs. And the framework is not haphazard. It is built sequentially. For example, active verbs are acquired before passive verbs. All this is done without formal instruction. However, the authors would do well to examine why, later in life, students come to rely heavily on passives in their writing.

These findings, coupled with the authors' probe into how parents encourage their children to acquire language skills, have direct implications for second language instruction. In a traditional instructional approach, errors are highlighted. Yet studies show that parents do little to correct their children's speech. Furthermore, corrections make no impact on the child's language development because the child must master some language patterns before others. Regardless, children acquire language without exposure to what is offered in many language arts classrooms – drills, extensively corrected writing assignments, pop quizzes, etc. The authors write: "While input from caregivers is essential for the process of language acquisition to take place, no explicit teaching is necessary" (p.20). The same holds true regarding grammar. The authors argue that the problem with grammar instruction is two-fold. First, it concentrates on form over meaning. Second, when meaning comes into play, surface meaning is the focus, but surface meaning is only good if it allows the person to construct deep-structure meaning. However, the authors are not willing to discard all formal instruction. They argue that although reading remains the key to greater mastery of English syntax, "some activities that involve combining sentences can lead to more complex writing" (p.240).

The authors proceed to delve further into writing. Two approaches, the l>word recognition view and the *sociopsycholinguistic view*, are scrutinized. The former holds that the written language must be learned, while the latter holds that "to some degree [written language] is innate and can be acquired." This is an old battle, but one that continues to draw debate because of the challenge to the traditional/prescriptive approach that continues to be widely used in classrooms and touted by those who argue for a 'back-to-basics' approach to language instruction. The word recognition view offers security to those who see new approaches to instruction as the first step to unlocking a Pandora's box. At face value, it may appear that giving students words, prefixes, and suffixes to memorize would lead to increased vocabulary. The authors conclude differently. When vocabulary is offered in a decontextualized manner, students will not own the words. A student may be able to match a word with its correct definition on a multiple-choice test, but he may not be

able to use it in context. Furthermore, knowing the meaning of a prefix, suffix, or root may not help because those individual components may not add up to an accurate definition. Take the word capitulation. Capit means "head" and -ion means "state or condition of." But these segments offer no clue to the word's meaning -- a uniform tax imposed upon each person. A student would have to be clairvoyant to arrive at the meaning of the word by studying its component parts. All said, the authors return time and again to reading, the wonder drug of language instruction. Like aspirin, its benefits are many.

The approach to vocabulary from a sociopsycholinguistic view is to have students read extensively so that they can acquire vocabulary as they encounter words in a variety of contexts. When vocabulary is pretaught, students might learn a definition for a word, but knowing a word involves much more than that. By seeing the word several times in slightly different contexts, students can figure out its properties, including what endings it can take (its morphology), what role it plays in the sentence (its syntax), whether it is formal or informal (its pragmatics), along with its meaning (its semantics). Students acquire this information in the process of reading (p.28).

*Essential Linguistics* propounds on the need to approach vocabulary scientifically. Students learn more when they are asked to investigate words and come up with rules that govern the language. In doing so, they go beyond memorizing definitions by probing language to discover patterns. The authors also discuss boredom, the artery- congesting bane of language instruction. Chief among a teacher's tasks is the design of lessons that engage. If tedium sets in for the students, what Chomsky calls the language acquisition device will not be triggered; hence, filters will go up, and students will not learn. The authors also probe academic English, an area of language that poses challenge because it is often learned solely within the context of school. A student who may be proficient in conversational English may have difficulty with academic English. Given this, the responsibility lies with teachers to create structure that allows students to access this area of English.

*Essential Linguistics* offers a look at the complexity of sound production before exploring the world of words and their spellings (orthography). For teachers frustrated at what appears to be inconsistency in the spelling of English, useful information is offered about the evolution of the language. English *does* adhere to rules governing spelling and pronunciation. Population movement, discovery, war, and a host of other factors have affected the way English is spelled and pronounced. The Great Vowel Shift offers insight into how language changes:

The major change, which occurred during the 1500s, is referred to as the Great Vowel Shift. During this period, a complex series of changes occurred in the pronunciation of the vowels. The long vowels were pronounced at a higher point in the mouth. In Middle English a vowel in a word like *feet* was pronounced more like the vowel sound in *fate*. By 1500, *feet* had developed its current pronunciation. In addition, high vowels became diphthongs and moved to a lower position. A word like *town* was once pronounced more like *tune*. The /uw/ became /aw/ (p.104).

This has implications for the way spelling is taught. In a traditional approach to spelling, a teacher gives a student a list of words. The student is then asked to write out the definitions of the words. It is hoped that through this method, a student will come to grasp both meaning and spelling. However, spelling taught word by word is ineffective. There are too many variations to the rules of spelling. The authors argue for an approach that involves investigating words. During this process, students write out rules that they have come across in their searches, and, in this way, students come to understand first-hand how the language is pieced together. However, the authors need to do more to offer specific examples about how this investigative method could be most effectively employed in the classroom. For example, how many words should be offered to students for investigation in the course of, say, a semester? Should the teacher select words that have some interconnectedness (e.g., words pertaining to the weather or to a historical period)? Should the investigations have narrow or broad parameters?

Because the association between word and object is arbitrary, reading plays a crucial role in fostering vocabulary skills. The authors warn that time taken away from reading to teach vocabulary directly is time misspent. They cite studies by Anderson and Nagy who claim:

"An avid reader might spend an hour or two a day reading, and thus cover four or more times as much text. The rate of learning from context for self-selected text is likely to be closer to one unfamiliar word in ten than one in twenty. For children who do a fair amount of independent reading, then, natural learning could easily lead to the acquisition of five to ten thousand words a year, and thus account for the bulk of their annual vocabulary growth" (p.201).

*Essential Linguistics* casts a wide net over the study of English. Then it draws in the information in an

engaging and informative manner. It argues against a 'back to the basics' approach to language instruction. The study of language is going through change brought about by extensive investigation into language acquisition and cognitive development. *Essential Linguistics* takes the novice to that first step towards the understanding of language acquisition. To the seasoned professional, this work by David and Yvonne Freeman can help to reinforce valid practice in the classroom.

### References

Chomsky, N. (1975). *Reflections on Language*. New York: Pantheon.

Pages: 263 Price: \$28.00 ISBN: 0-325-22374-6

**Reviewed by Pablo Delgado, Ruamrudee International School, Bangkok, Thailand**

**Kendall, Juli & Khuon, Outey (2005). *Making Sense: Small-Group Comprehension Lessons for English Language Learners*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.**

*Making Sense* is a must-have resource for anyone teaching reading comprehension to students whose first language is not English. Each chapter provides lesson plans for different phases of English language development: preproduction, early production, speech emergence, intermediate and advanced. The chapters are full of activities and lists of books appropriate for both younger and older English language learners in grades K through 8.

Don't skip the introduction. It explains how to use small group instruction, how to select books, and how to assess a student's use of reading strategies. The chart on pages ten and eleven outlines the stages of language proficiency, followed by ten actual student case studies.

Each lesson plan is divided into four to six comprehension strategies: making connections, asking questions, visualizing, inferring or predicting; and for advanced readers, determining importance and synthesizing. Each strategy is then divided into four teaching moves: start up/connection, give information, active involvement, and off you go. The needed resources, books and materials are highlighted in the margins. Teachers can use the lessons as provided in the book or develop their own lessons following the model described. Either way, this book is a gold mine of resources useful for beginning to mid-career teachers.

*Making Sense* is packed full of diagrams, charts, photos, and samples of students' actual work. Ideas for using overhead transparencies and self-stick notes abound. The sixteen page resource list includes twelve pages of children's literature, plus professional materials on related topics, videos and DVDs, student magazines and web sites. The web sites were all active as of the date this review was written.

*Making Sense* belongs in the hands of every reading teaching in America teaching multilingual students. In mixed classrooms of native and non-native English speakers, all students will benefit from the reading strategies and small group instruction outlined in this text.

Pages: 168 Price: \$18.50 ISBN: 1-57110-409-7

**Reviewed by Kathy Irwin, University of Michigan, Dearborn**

**Murakami, Yoichiro; Kawamura, Noiko & Chiba, Shin, editors. (2005) *Toward a Peaceable Future: Redefining Peace, Security and Kyosei From a Multidisciplinary Perspective*. Pullman, WA: The Thomas S. Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service.**

Murakami, Kawamura and Chiba have edited a complex, thoroughly researched volume on the subject of understanding and promoting peace in difficult times. With Iraq either imploding in the flames of civil war or on the verge of welcoming a new, democratic dawn, it is a propitious time for a new book to be published that discusses in detail the possibilities of creating a peaceable future. While the book is certainly not specific in its consideration of a single conflict, the current war in Iraq provides a number of illuminating examples of how certain policy initiatives are failing to promote the peace which the initiators say they pursue. Using diverse perspectives including psychology, sociology, environmentalism, political science, history, feminism, economics and more, Murakami et al have crafted a book that explores a number of the causes of martial strife and proposes a prism through which a more peaceful future may be envisioned.

The editors define peace and security in more or less traditional geopolitical, biological, psychological, religious and personal terms. Parts of several chapters may be seen as refreshers for well-known concepts in psychology, economics and so on. A unique contribution, however, is their introduction of the concept of *kyosei*, which is difficult to translate directly from the Japanese. In general, the word means variously "convivial", "symbiotic", a commonality or a state of affairs in which different peoples live together with a sense of equality and respect for one another's differences. The term implies a number of positive social attributes in which respect is given to and received from people despite their clear differences. As the use of the term is still in flux, even in Japan, no ultimate, single definition can as yet be offered. Various authors in this book use the term to indicate a desirable state of positive regard for other people that embraces their differences and accepts those differences as valid ways of dealing with the world.

The book traces how security, safety and risk are both gained and lost by individuals and nations, and it focuses on elaborating ways in which peace, security and *kyosei* might be created in venues where they are currently lacking. The idea of *kyosei* permeates the book and where it is not directly addressed, it certainly exists as desirable subtext. Thus, for example, when discussing current U.S. militarism, one author cites Eisenhower's famous warning about the military-industrial complex. The implication is that such an entity could not exist were *kyosei* to exist more profusely in the U.S.

This book is not for the casual booklover who is looking for a quick or easy read. Concepts are presented in thorough, carefully documented detail. An important feature of every chapter is a sequential, clearly outlined and elaborated structure. This aids the reader in maintaining focus and following the authors' arguments from introduction to conclusion. Prose is often tightly woven and is, except perhaps for the elusive definition of *kyosei*, clear and succinct.

In a number of chapters, the United States comes in for close scrutiny in both positive and negative terms. Authors who deal specifically with current U.S.-Iraqi policy generally see the U.S. as severely wanting (and certainly lacking in *kyosei*) to the detriment of others and ultimately ourselves. There is evenhandedness in the treatment of U.S. policy in other areas. The book should not be seen as a U.S.-bashing polemic. Rather, it proposes a re-evaluation of policies, from individual to international; the ultimate goal is to increase the number of secure and peaceful people - and the amount of *kyosei* - everywhere. The book is an important addition to the body of work on the study and promotion of peace.

The book did technically have a chapter about education, but the VAST bulk of the chapter (about 11 of 12 pages) was on defining the many types of *kyosei* and their relationships to society. A page or so on education wasn't enough, in my opinion, to warrant directing educators toward the book so they might improve curriculum, etc. It would be a useful resource for the academic who wishes to add historical, psychological, biological, sociological or religious information to papers, discussions or lectures on peace studies.

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