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Brief reviews for September 2005

Benard, Bonnie (2004) *Resiliency: What We Have Learned*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

In the past decade, resiliency theory has developed into a new paradigm, a new way of thinking about and working with human beings across the lifespan, but especially during the years of childhood and adolescence. Resiliency can be described as how children and youth “overcome the odds to become competent, confident, caring individuals”(Werner & Smith, 1992). This paradigm is a shift to a more positive approach to education, prevention and other human services. No longer do the grim statistics of overwhelming negative odds for today’s youth predict low success rates in life. The presence of those odds can be viewed as necessary to build resiliency factors that are needed to succeed. Resiliency research has focused on identifying these factors and how to instill them into today’s youth. Bonnie Benard’s is a comprehensive review of relevant resiliency research conducted during the past decade.

Benard has developed the following four conclusions regarding resiliency based on research study findings:

- Resiliency is a capacity all youth have for healthy development and successful learning.
- Certain personal strengths are associated with healthy development and successful learning.
- Certain characteristics of families, schools, and communities are associated with the development of personal strengths and, in turn, healthy development and successful learning.
- Changing the life trajectories of children and youth from risk to resilience starts with changing the beliefs of the adults in the families, schools, and communities.

A common theme throughout the book, is the premise that all people have resiliency. I appreciate Benard’s approach that we should view youth as all having the capacity to become successful through developing resiliency. She dispels the popular misconception that resiliency is some mystical quality that some people have and some do not. Benard quotes Ann Masten, “What began as a quest to understand the extraordinary has revealed the power of the ordinary. Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in the families and relationships, and in their communities” (Masten, 2001). This fantastic shift in perspective applies to educators in that we have the ability to support the development of resiliency in youth, and that resilience can be impacted in practical ways. In essence, she states that if we as adults have faith in the good of our children and believe children can succeed no matter what their personal circumstances, then our children will envelop that confidence and develop those characteristics that contribute to resiliency.

The main meat of the book discusses what factors or characteristics contribute to resiliency. Benard breaks these factors down into categories of personal strengths and environmental strengths of family, school and community. I find this to be a fairly common thread in most resiliency research and Benard does a thorough job of including these characteristics. She also provides several very comprehensive appendices detailing these protective factors and traits.

The discussion of personal strengths in the book covers areas that are universal knowledge in the education and prevention fields. Benard outlines these internal assets in four categories of social competence, problem solving, autonomy and sense of purpose. I found noteworthy her discussion of the language of strengths in this section, which reflects the influential positive perspective adults need to embody when working with youth. “Positive language helps educators and parents reframe how they see their your people. Using a language of strengths versus a language of limitations help adults begin to look for and find strengths in their young people and then to name and reflect back to youth the strengths they have witnessed.” (p.36)

Environmental factors addressed in the book include family, school and community influences. Again, Benard thoroughly covers these factors in a youth's life. She addresses the role of parents, quality of school environment, and the power of community.

Benard goes on to address the most important aspect, in my opinion, of applying resiliency research to today's youth: evidence based prevention and educational programming. Many powerful programs such as mentoring, service-learning, small schools, and youth development programs provide excellent support and learning opportunities. Benard argues that the vehicle of support is not what is important but how that vehicle is applied. She states that "it is not what we do that counts, but how we do it" (Benard, 1999). These programs do not have to be the perfect method of delivery because no program design can compensate for lack of caring in the implementation. The key ingredient, then, is adults that exude the resilient characteristics of competence, confidence, and most of all, caring.

Summary Comments:

Resiliency continues to be a hot topic among researchers, educators and prevention professionals. Bonnie Benard does an excellent job of condensing the research into a readable, understandable and well-organized synopsis that is useful to educators, prevention professionals, counselors and parents. I found it refreshing how the book details the relevant factors that contribute to resilience as well as presents the change in viewpoint from a negative outlook to a positive approach in supporting the normal human developmental process. Such a change in attitude and approach towards working with our youth seems simple but using terminology such as high risk or at risk youth immediately places a stigma on those youth that implies they have less of a chance to succeed. I recommend this book to anyone searching for a positive approach to working with youth. *Resiliency: What We Have Learned* provides a solid foundation for building programs that serve and support developing competent, confident and caring youth.

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Werner, E. & Smith, R. (2001). *Journeys from childhood to the midlife: Risk, resilience, and recovery*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Pages: 148 Price: \$16.95 ISBN: 0 914409 18 2

Reviewed by Angela Zwygart, Prevention Programming Coordinator, Farmington Municipal Schools, Farmington, New Mexico and Graduate Student, Adams State College, Alamosa, Colorado

Block, Cathy Collins; Rodgers, Lori L. & Johnson, Rebecca B. (2004). *Comprehension Process Instruction: Creating Reading Success in Grades K-3*. New York: Guilford.

As the authors note there is a critical need for a focus on teaching approaches to enhance students' comprehension of texts and for development of aesthetic and knowledge based responses to texts. Using a Comprehension Process Instruction (CPI) model with a scaffolded three strand framework of "before the point of need, at the point of need and student application after the point of need", this book has the admirable aim of focusing the active processes of comprehension. In general it provides a wealth of information and ideas to support both pre-service and in-service teachers' pedagogical knowledge and practices. It comprehensively addresses components of comprehension essential for students as they encounter complex texts in later grades. The emphasis on metacognitive as well as cognitive processes is to be commended.

As a text to support study this book has a number of strengths. Each chapter is introduced with questions to guide the chapter and is concluded with a clear summary, and a section "Reflecting on what you have learned" encouraging application and review. Each chapter also has a section that succinctly summarizes research on the specific aspect of comprehension discussed. For students including a theoretical and research-based rationale for the particular comprehension component, and appropriate pedagogical approaches, provides a sound basis for practice. For busy teachers using the book as a resource to enrich their literacy programmes, who need easy reference to approaches to implement in the classroom, the layout of the text is not very accessible and the content of the main body of the chapters not well organized. At times the text is repetitive and somewhat pedantic in the amount of detail provided. The relationships between text description and the table, diagram or illustration are not always evident.

The authors introduce a strategy to support Comprehension Process Instruction, which they refer to as

Comprehension Process Motions. These are actions for students, loosely based on American Sign Language, used to cue them into using particular strategies, for example predicting, finding main ideas or rereading. For some children the addition of kinesthetic aspects to the reading and comprehending process is no doubt motivating and a way of making abstract components more concrete. However I would caution the use of such approaches for all children as their focus may be more on conducting the action itself rather than the underlying cognitive process. It would be useful to have further independent research evidence on the effectiveness of such approaches presented. Most of the cited research, directly related to CPI and the use of CPM, appears to be by the first author of the book.

The final chapter introduces some interesting approaches to assessing comprehension. It is pleasing to note a focus on assessing the processes of comprehension rather than products. So often, assessment of comprehension consists only of questions, following the reading of a passage. Such assessment provides only minimal information on the depth of the reader's understanding of the text. The dialogue between teacher and student involved in some of the approaches has the potential to reveal insights into the students' thinking. However, some of the suggested assessment approaches are not assessing comprehension but are systems to record strategies used. While this certainly assesses how well the student has learnt to do the CPM processes, I am not convinced that they would ascertain the depth of the readers' understanding of, and response to, the text as a result of using the CPM. The inclusion of self-assessment approaches for students is valuable, but the formats provided would need to be used cautiously. Some of the proformas provided focus on negative behaviours with language that seems inappropriate for students in K to Grade 3. For example, in a Student Self-responsibility Guide, students are asked note if they apply a number of statements to themselves. One is *"Not reading or writing very often to solve problems in life or for personal pleasure."*

The book is not edited as well as I would expect from a publisher of this standing. There are typographical errors in most chapters and some of the photographs are neither clear, nor do they support the point being made in the text. They appear to be merely illustrations, rather than supportive visual information to provide the reader with a clearer understanding of the aspect of the process being described.

Overall, although I commend the intent of the book, I felt that it is only marginally useful for classroom teachers, student teachers and teacher educators, and some of the assessment proformas would need to be used with caution.

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Reviewed by Libby Limbrick, Head of Centre for Language and Languages, The University of Auckland

Copeland, Matt (2005). *Socratic Circles: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in Middle and High School*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

"If we honestly seek to produce self-directed learners and holistic individuals, we must change our classrooms and embrace strategies such as the Socratic circle" (p. 23). Matt Copeland's *Socratic Circles: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in Middle and High School* is a very timely exposition of the process of Adler's (1982) Socratic mode of instruction at a time when teachers may sorely be tempted to sacrifice diverse learning strategies on the altar of improved test scores. In 163 pages, Copeland has shared succinctly, but with a great wealth of detail, his experiences as a classroom teacher in conducting one form of Adler's Socratic seminar that he calls, "Socratic Circles." *Socratic Circles* is a convincing description of that seminar from one teacher to another that "shows" (rather than "tells") how, with clear guidance and structure, students can take charge of their own learning.

The book begins by establishing the background for the instructional strategy including its definition, history and the learning objectives it is capable of addressing. At the outset, in a brief and relevant discussion of the history of the instructional strategy, Copeland defines Socratic seminar through a quote from Adler's admirer, Lambright, as an "exploratory intelligent conversation centered on text" (Lambright, 1995, p. 30). Copeland clarifies his definition of the strategy by listing the difference between Socratic circles and literature circles. After that he discusses the various academic skills (critical reading, listening, speaking, writing, and reflection) and social skills (team building and conflict resolution) that may be fostered through Socratic circles. Even though Copeland does not indicate that he has used a formal research design to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy, his arguments are very convincing. He exhorts teachers to take on the challenge of making classroom practice more suited to the needs of a diverse and changing world. According to him, despite top down reform movements, "Honest change comes from within" (p 22). The book is an attempt to help teachers bring about such a change.

The Socratic Seminar is based on the idea of Socratic dialogue in which *teachers* lead student discussion through careful questioning to higher levels of thinking, analysis and interaction. In Copeland's version of the

seminar *students* are responsible for reading the text critically, conducting the discussion through questions, answers and comments, and reflecting upon the process. In essence, Socratic circles in Copeland's classroom look like this: students are divided into two randomly selected groups, the inner and outer circle. The inner circle starts off in its discussion of the text by the teacher typically asking a "low risk, open-ended question" (Copeland, p.94). The outer circle is responsible for listening to the dialogue in the inner circle and, after the discussion is complete (in about 20 minutes), providing feedback to the members of the inner circle about the effectiveness (not content) of the dialogue. Then the process is repeated with the circles exchanging places. Finally, all students turn in a personal reflective piece of writing about the discussed text as well as the process of the circle.

Copeland describes in detail every element of the process of planning and facilitating Socratic circles, from choosing the text and helping students prepare for the dialogue, to facilitating the outer and inner circle discussions and assessment. They include a multitude of examples, real life anecdotes, and copies of handouts or other tools the author uses to attain the objectives he describes. I particularly like how each chapter is prefaced by student dialogue that captures the essence of what is described in that chapter. Here's a sample of a dialogue among students inspired by Langston Hughes's "Let America Be America Again."

Jalen: *What do you think the tone of this poem is?*

Tara: *It's hard to pin down. There's some anger in there, there's some regret, there's even some pride.*

Chris: *I agree. But more than anything I think the tone is hopeful and determined. The second to last stanza says it all, I think: "And yet I swear this oath—I America will be!" This guy is determined to make America a great place. (p. 57.)*

Following the preface, the body of each chapter effectively describes each step of the process. Some of these will be of particular interest to teachers. For instance, Copeland discusses the nuts and bolts of how, before the actual strategy is implemented, teachers must cultivate a classroom environment that is conducive to dialogue. Part of this is to teach students basic skills and dispositions to prepare them to be successful participants in Socratic circles: academic skills such as how to ask questions about texts before and after reading them or how to seek multiple perspectives, and social skills such as how to work in groups. Copeland also prepares students to evaluate dialogue by meta- analyzing their own class discussions. Finally, he recommends that teachers actually discuss the difference between dialogue and debate and goes so far as to provide readers with a handout he uses for this purpose.

In each of his chapters on how a teacher might facilitate inner and outer circle dialogue, the author briefly gives suggestions on how to deal with problems in the process: groups that either talk too much or not at all, students who are inappropriate, etc. A few more examples including short excerpts from a Socratic circle in which such problems have occurred would have been useful to teachers, especially those who are reluctant to turn the control over learning to students. In my opinion, one of the most effective sections of the book is Chapter VI, in which the author presents an annotated transcript of an entire Socratic circle. It brings the instructional strategy alive and gives the reader a glimpse of the students' potential for thoughtful analysis and construction of meaning. It also shows how the teacher can observe and help students with what they need to develop that potential.

After the step-by-step discussion, the author takes a step back with a broader look at the process in gestalt including theoretical details such as Adler's three columns of learning. He situates the strategy in the context of the whole curriculum, discusses the use of alternative genres such as pictures and music and touches upon the cross curricular applications.

Finally, Copeland offers a substantive discussion of assessment of Socratic circles along with helpful assessment tools. Particularly useful for teachers are the exhaustive rubrics he provides for evaluating students and the description of the assignment he gives students for reflection. As a professor, I have found it very helpful to have a template for an assignment or assessment that I can then modify for my classes. All the suggestions and recommendations are very practical and for the most part applicable under diverse circumstances.

In the end, I was left with few questions. How teachers can keep the discussion focused entirely on the text is very well illustrated by the author. But how would a teacher handle a factual error by a student especially when it related to a situation or content outside the text with which the teacher was not entirely familiar? Knowing that the author has implemented Socratic circles in his classroom for five years, it would have been helpful if he had discussed situations in which students had made such errors. Finally, researchers looking for a systematic study of the effectiveness of Socratic circles on academic and social skills of students might be disappointed. While many scholars have extolled the virtues of Socratic questioning and seminars, there are not many empirical studies in the literature I examined on the subject. Cook and Chant (2004) have started some excellent work on the subject especially in the field of social studies, and we can look forward to their publishing it. Polite and Adams (1997) have examined the use of Socratic seminar for critical thinking

skills. Copeland's Socratic Circles is clearly for teachers, which is probably why he does not wish to belabor them with detailed empirical and theoretical considerations. On the other hand, he does situate the strategy in the Paideia framework through a short discussion of Adler's *The Three Columns of Learning* (Adler, 1982).

We all know that there are many teachers out there pushing the envelope of learning, trying out new strategies, and helping students develop higher level cognitive, social and affective skills. We also know that there are teachers looking to be convinced that Socratic circles are doable. And there are teachers looking for a "how-to" book about Socratic seminars. To them, and to all other teachers and scholars, I say, "Read the book!"

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Pages: 163 Price: \$17.50 ISBN: 1-57110-394-5

Reviewed by Lalita Subrahmanyam, Professor, Elementary & Middle Level Education, Department of Teacher Development, St. Cloud State University

Garrick, Ross (2004). *Playing Outdoors in the Early Years*. London: Continuum Publishing.

Editor's note, there is a similar title with the same ISBN by this author: *Outdoor Play in the Early Years*. (2004). New York: Continuum Publishing. 112 pages. *Outdoor Play* is the title under which the book appears on the publisher's web pages.

Playing Outdoors in the Early Years - as its title implies - is a guide for incorporating outdoor play into the early childhood curriculum. This small, pocket-sized book is part of a series of books called "Classmates". These books are written for classroom practitioners, and cover topics ranging from *Managing your classroom* to *Assemblies made easy*. In this particular edition, the author has included rationale for, and examples of, the use of outdoor play to enhance the lives of young children.

The first three chapters of the book discuss the importance of outdoor play in early childhood education and include rationale, historical examples, and child development theories. These chapters cite numerous research examples of the benefits of outdoor experiences for young children.

Chapters 4 and 5 form a "how-to" for incorporating outdoor play into an early childhood setting. The first of these chapters provides examples of situations encountered when programs implement an outdoor curriculum. In this way the author presents the reader with focus areas for further discussion of the topic. Examples of issues presented include messy play and unpredictable weather. After each example is the question "What would you do?" and then the reader is led through discussion of possible approaches. The following chapter is devoted to planning an outdoor curriculum. This chapter touches on the importance of team planning and the use of curriculum frameworks. It then recommends numerous features to include in an outdoor area to provide opportunities for learning, such as a music space, a physical play space, a role-play area, and many others. There are four case studies involved that present a variety of approaches to the implementation of an outdoor curriculum.

The last two chapters are very brief and suggest opportunities for further examination, including examples of international curricula and approaches, as well as resources for further information.

I recommend this book for administrators of early childhood education programs. A teacher will also benefit from this book by gaining knowledge about the rationale for outdoor play. However, it is a book that is mostly geared for those in a position to create and implement an outdoor program. To that end, it very clearly provides a rationale for outdoor play in early childhood experiences and addresses issues of teaching and learning in outdoor settings.

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Kidwell, V. (2004). *Assemblies made easy*. London: Continuum.

Reviewed by Christina Siry, Instructor, Manhattanville College School of Education

Morgan, Bruce & Odom, Deb (2005). *Writing Through the Tween Years: Supporting Writers, Grades 3-6*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Divided into three areas, *Writing Through the Tween Years*, discusses and at the same time demonstrates how to support students who are becoming writers and becoming teens. Although the book names two authors, it is written in the first person and is presented to the reader as Morgan's voice. Morgan emphasizes the importance of creating writing workshops in the classroom over teaching for test results in order to remember that a teacher's job is "to know our students as people and to honor their struggles and growth" (p. 3). He discusses how to organize an in-class writing workshop, how to use mentor texts to co-develop reading and writing, how to use Living Books—a journal-like project—to allow students to explore and enjoy writing, as well as how to teach writing essentials, such as punctuation, within the writing workshop.

It is Morgan's passion for writing and the power that he sees in using writing in the class that led him and fellow teachers to invest in creating in-class writing workshops instead of teaching to the state test. As Morgan notes, "I want my writing workshops to make a difference in the lives of my students. I want to use writing as a vehicle to get to know them better as human beings and to be part of their lives" (p. 7). The move to re-evaluate not only what was being taught, but how it was being taught is situated in the current debate and emphasis on student assessment. However, Morgan's honest discussion of facing his own fears as a teacher of writing, the fear of not knowing enough and not being a good enough writer, is provocative. He points out how collectively he and other teachers rejected formulaic writing and replaced it with a plan for what they were going to teach and why. He stresses that using the writing workshop in the classroom can be messy, uncomfortable, and sometimes nerve-wracking – but it always is about "real kids who write" (p. 7).

Morgan encourages the use of writing workshops in the classroom as a way for students to develop reading and writing in ways that are meaningful to them. Yet the writing workshops will also provide the necessary tools needed to aid in test preparation. Morgan explains how to organize and structure the in-class writing workshop, with attention on how to divide class time, how to arrange the "Oval Office" (p. 31), and how to gradually release control of the class over to the students so that they are engaged in classroom procedures and involved in the decision-making process. Many of the writing techniques discussed in *Writing Through the Tween Years* are useful for all writers and teachers of writers. However, it is the voice of Morgan's students throughout the text, the voice of becoming writers and teens, that offer insight into the unique role teachers of grades 3-6 offer to their students. In support of tween writers, Morgan urges teachers to get to know their students through writing. He provides many stories from his classroom that allow readers to visualize how to incorporate these techniques into their teaching. The stories are beautifully written, often funny and always messy.

Morgan introduces the use of Mentor Texts that demonstrate different writing genres. These are texts that teachers can use instead of their own writing to illustrate superior writing to their students. Here teachers learn, both to share their own in-process writing with their class and to learn new writing techniques from the Mentor Texts along with students. Teacher and student are both using the mentor text to provide instruction on great writing, and inspiration for new topics. Morgan is able to address the fears of many teachers, that of not being good writers and with that of not being good teachers of writing. He demonstrates through his discussion of Mentor Texts how being vulnerable by sharing your in-progress writing with students can allow your students also to take risks in their learning to write. He stresses that the Mentor Text is the example that both student and teacher are trying to emulate in their practice writing. To encourage students to be motivated and inspired to write, along with using Mentor Texts, Morgan also introduces how to use Living Books. Living Books are not simply journals, but "a record of life...bits and pieces we might miss if we didn't get it onto paper to be reread and revisited" (p. 48). The Living Books, or artist's notebooks, allow students a place to record events that can be taken up as future writing topics. Both students and teacher are creating Living Books daily, and Morgan relates how to introduce this type of writing by sharing with your students your own entries in your Living Book, asking other teachers to share with your class their Living Books and finally asking the students to begin writing their own observations and reflections on the previous day.

The final section discusses how to incorporate teaching punctuation, spelling and different genre writing. By using the techniques of the writing workshop, in particular the individual conferences and demonstrations with the class as a whole, Morgan shows how individual students have unique needs in terms of learning strategies. His examples of students illustrate how different students need differing strategies to develop the mechanics of writing. It is here that Morgan points out that the writing workshop can facilitate different learning styles through its structure, organization and the emphasis on student involvement.

This book is beautifully written and surprisingly engaging and funny. Readers will get to know the students in Morgan's class. Morgan is not simply telling stories, but he is demonstrating how educators can best support becoming writers and becoming teens.

Pages: 160 Price: \$15.00 ISBN: 1-57110-406-2

Reviewed by Pariss Garramone, a doctoral student at York University in Toronto. Her work focuses on sustainability and education, and particularly explores the role of writing to discuss sustainability issues with young women.

Noppe-Brandon, Gail (2004). *Find Your Voice: A Methodology for Enhancing Literacy Through Re- Writing and Re-Acting*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

This book offers an instructional model, through a series of sequenced activities, designed to promote the development of effective communication through theater. Defining *literacy* as a broad term, the author addresses a set of communicative competencies including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Using *theater company* as a metaphor for the classroom, the book describes the model from the first days of class through the last.

The first chapters focus on the importance of establishing a trusting classroom environment through relationships developed between the students and the teacher, and among the students themselves. Later chapters discuss specifically ways that teachers can help students develop self-confidence and self-esteem through activities such as play writing, peer editing, revision, and performance. Throughout the book, there are examples and stories of the ways this model effectively helped students overcome shyness and fear of public performance. As an appendix, the author provides a list of plays and major roles, and in a "theater-as-therapy" way, identifies the kind of student who would benefit from these roles.

This book is aimed primarily at teachers of English, but because students can use and build communicative competence throughout their day, the model would also be of interest to teachers of other subjects. Most of the stories woven throughout the book are about teenagers, but, as the author explains, this model could be adapted effectively for use with younger and older students. The strategies outlined in this book are clearly explained, and would be easy to implement.

I strongly support the unification of theatrical principles and literacy. I wish the author had focused more on how the activities presented in the book enhance reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills for all learners, rather than dwelling on student deficits. As an educator, I believe that students bring strengths to classrooms, and one of the teacher's missions is to identify those strengths and use them to facilitate further development. Sometimes, the "theater-as-prescription" approach in this book became tiresome because the author's stance seemed to focus on weaknesses instead of a student's platform of strength.

Throughout the book, the author asserts that shyness is a disability. Teachers who view quiet students as disabled and in need of a cure may find this book just what the doctor ordered. For those who see students as generally healthy people who benefit from supportive teaching as they grow in competence and confidence, the activities in the book would still be helpful, but the diagnosis of communicative disability, and theater-as-prescription, may be a bitter pill to swallow.

Pages: 157 Price: \$18.95 ISBN: 0-325-00701-2

Reviewed by Kathryn Pole. Ms. Pole is a doctoral candidate in the Reading Department, Texas Woman's University, Denton Texas, and teaches undergraduate teacher education courses in literacy.

Primary Source, Inc. (2004). *Making Freedom: African Americans in United States History*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Overview of the Five-Volume Set:

The Sourcebooks, examining African American thought from beginnings in Africa to 1970, are aligned with chronological eras traditionally studied in U.S. History: True to Our Native Land (Beginnings to 1770); The Harmonies of Liberty (1771-1830); Lift Every Voice: Speaking for Freedom (1831-1860); Our New Day Begun (1861-1877); and March On Till Victory (1878-1970). Each book contains context essays by scholars, primary sources, 12-20 lesson plans by classroom teachers and Primary Source staff, and sidebar connections to contemporary events. Included in each volume are an introduction, timeline and extensive annotated

bibliography for the entire series. Each book will be accompanied by a CD of primary sources, including maps, paintings, portraits, photographs and music.

You can buy these as separate books for \$28.50 or less or as a set for \$114. For those teachers in charge of United States history curriculum you might try the whole package, but for most educators it would be money better spent by isolating the time period you want and buying the appropriate book(s). Each book comes with a CD of primary resources, maps, photos and art work in abundance. There is even music. Figure between 100 and 200 entries per book and most of them are quite interesting.

What can you say about a five-volume set of primary resource materials, lesson plans, essays, and timelines that stretches from the 1770s to the 1970s and extensively covers the African American in United States history? Well, the answer is that it is great, but at a cost of \$114 it has two shortcomings. First, it is written at much too high a reading level for many students. For example on page 117 of the first volume it states:

A significant number of enslaved Africans were from areas with rivers, streams, and delta waters. Plantation owners employed some African slaves as boat captains or patroons. These slaves were often kept away from field hands and house slaves because they were trusted with relative freedom of movement up and down the rivers and through surrounding areas

My students could not understand where the slaves were captains, Africa or the South, and words like patroons, relative freedom of movement, and up and down the river confused them and they were a typical group of eighth grade students. However, they were very interested in where the slaves learned to sail and what up and down a river meant.

Secondly, the objectives for some of the lessons are good, but don't really relate to the level most students are at and require them to make judgments from documents that are too sophisticated for them. For example, it is a suggested activity that students bring in food that represents their various cultures to share. This might have been a good idea a while back, but it leaves the door open for a lot of potential problems today. That is why it is extremely important for the purchaser to go over these books carefully. They are full of good ideas, but many are dated and from a simpler time.

Finally, I must add that the print quality isn't all that good. Many pictures and illustrations lack good registration, but that could be from the condition of the original image.

Despite that, this is arguably the most complete collection of lesson plans and source material on slavery and the African American in America, I have ever seen. The primary resource materials are wonderful. The fact that they also come with a CD of materials is just icing on this towering cake of quality work. I don't have the expertise to judge the accuracy of its historical data or whether or not it is objective in its portrayal of African Americans, but even at its worst the material presented would provide a counterpoint to the stereotyped lessons that are abundant in textbooks today.

I would highly suggest these for a university class, despite the publisher's recommendation that they be used in middle and high school. It is not that the material is too difficult or the lesson ideas too complicated, it is the expense of the books and the amount of material that must be covered in public schools under state mandated curriculum standards. The collection would be ideal for a college class on African American history or on the Civil War or on the history of minorities or civil rights.

Even using just a part of one of these five excellent books to enhance a US history class would add depth to the lessons and provide some terrific insights into what life must have been like at that time.

I highly recommend it for a district library where teachers could pick and choose their way through the five volumes. It also should be considered for schools of education and history departments. I enjoyed it, learned from it, and appreciated it. Good job.

Pages: **5 volume set** Price: **\$114.00**

Five volume set. For selected sections and overview online go to:

http://www.heinemann.com/shared/products/002100.asp#online_resource and http://www.primarysource.org/library/cur_iah.html

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A Song Full of Hope: 1770-1830 (Sourcebook 2), ISBN: 0-325-00516-8; The American Revolution through the forging of our nation

Lift Ev'ry Voice: 1830-1860 (Sourcebook 3), ISBN: 0-325-00517-6; The volatile decades that led to the Civil War

Our New Day Begun: 1861-1877 (Sourcebook 4), ISBN: 0-325-00518-4; The Civil War and the difficult

Reconstruction period that followed
March On Till Victory: 1877-1970 (Sourcebook 5), ISBN: 0-325- 00519-2 The end of the Reconstruction through the Civil Rights Movement
The CDs that are attached to the back cover of each book run on either Mac or Windows operating systems.

Reviewed by Alan Haskvitz, <http://www.reacheverychild.com>

Probst, Robert E. (2004). *Response and Analysis: Teaching Literature in Secondary School*. Second Edition. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

It was some ten years ago that, while preparing to enter the teaching profession, I encountered the first edition of Robert Probst's *Response and Analysis: Teaching Literature in Secondary School*. In retrospect, to claim that the reading of this book radically influenced my career as a secondary school English teacher would be a profound understatement. Now, having had a decade in which to implement a number of Probst's insightful concepts and practical strategies in multiple contexts, I am delighted to be able to review this new and expanded edition.

As in the first edition, Probst structures his approach to the teaching of literature according to the premises of Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory, wherein reading is viewed as an internal dialogue between the reader and the text. In contrast to the earlier view that meaning resides in the text, and thus is something the teacher must help the student to locate, the emphasis in this literary interpretation moves from the text to the reader. In fact, Probst underscores the prominence of the reader by dedicating three full chapters to detailing the reader's role as meaning-maker and exploring the interrelationship between the reader, the text and other readers of that text. Necessarily, such a pronounced focus on the reader also dramatically alters the role of the teacher in the classroom. It is here that secondary school teachers who see their role in more traditional terms, as transmitters of knowledge, might well find Probst's views most revolutionary. An unequivocal student advocate, Probst challenges educators to provide students with texts that appeal to them, and to engage in student-centred teaching strategies that allow them to dialogue with texts and other readers in a meaningful manner. These are the concepts that inspired me ten years ago. Now, they remind me again of the importance of focusing on the readers' interactions with the texts, rather than depending solely on the literature to communicate meaning.

For practical purposes, however, the book itself proves unwieldy in some ways. Although the publisher claims it has been updated and revised by Probst in order to "speak directly to today's busy teacher", a number of characteristics of the latest edition stand in the way of this outcome. First of all, the book is much too long i.e. almost three hundred pages in a rather minuscule font! Although the theories underpinning the very practical strategies that Probst provides in his workshops are crucial to his approach, their explication is much too detailed and repetitious. Also, the book seems to try to do too much. For example, Chapter Eight provides a historical overview of literature's place in the English curriculum, from Plato through the 1960's and into the 21st century. Arguably, valuable insights are offered here for the classroom teacher. However, to devote thirty pages to this subject late in the book seems almost a distraction. This chapter might better have either been drastically abridged and included in the introductory notes in earlier chapters, or further developed in another more theoretically-oriented context. This would not detract from the book's practical effectiveness and would certainly make it much more manageable for the intended busy teacher. The extensive bibliography is excellent and would provide the reader with ample further reading if required.

Do not conclude, however, that Probst's book is primarily a theoretical treatise on reader response criticism. Quite the contrary! In fact, theory is punctuated throughout by very practical and classroom-ready workshops that provide the teacher with a means to personally test out the principles that Probst advances. In this edition, Probst also provides educators with useful ideas for integrating contemporary media as a means to develop critical thinking skills. Finally, unique to this edition is a chapter on evaluation and testing that offers some practical assessment strategies adaptable to our current standards-based education environment.

Once again, Robert Probst has challenged me to consider the rationale behind each of the strategies I employ in the English classroom. It is this challenge that makes his second edition of *Reading and Response: Teaching Literature in Secondary School* an important book for any secondary school teacher who is more committed to students as readers than to literary works as objects of study.

Pages: 320 Price: \$27.00 ISBN: 0-325-00716-0

Reviewed by Anne Arthur, Onsite Administrator Public Alternative Secondary School -

Sweeney, Alyse (2004). *Fluency Lessons for the Overhead: Grades 4 - 6*. New York: Scholastic.

This instructional resource book provides teachers with structured lessons for classroom fluency instruction in grades four through six. It begins with a helpful introduction that defines fluency and explains the movement towards and rationale for using fluency instruction in the classroom. Though it would be helpful for Sweeney to be more specific regarding the research rationale for employing fluency training with intermediate level readers, *Fluency Lessons for the Overhead* is based on the following instructional methods identified as important elements of fluency instruction: modeling fluent reading; providing oral support for readers; providing opportunities for independent practice; focusing instruction on meaningful phrasing; and providing text that is written at the reader's independent reading level (Rasinski, 2003).

The book is comprised of a collection of fifteen fluency lessons, hierarchically arranged to facilitate the learning of skills associated with fluent reading. The seven lessons of parts one and two are designed to call students' attention to the prosodic features of text, i.e. the role of reading rate, phrasing, intonation and punctuation in expressive reading. Part three, the final section, presents eight lessons, which incorporate a variety of punctuation and typographical signals, requiring students to apply their new knowledge of prosodic features as they pursue expressive, fluent reading.

Each lesson utilizes poems or passages from books written by popular children's narrative and content area authors. These appear to be both topically interesting to students in the grade 4 – 6 range and appropriate in length (50 - 150 words) for the beneficial effects of fluency instruction to be maximized (Rasinski & Padak, 2001). Each lesson contains a teacher lesson plan, a transparency with the reading passage, and a student copy. According to the instructional sequence set out in the book, the teacher starts the lesson by reading the passage aloud as students follow along on the transparency. The teacher is then to pose questions designed to focus on the overall meaning of the passage as well as to clarify unfamiliar vocabulary. Each lesson plan provides the teacher with suggestions for highlighting the emphasis of that particular lesson. For example, in the "commas" lesson plan (p.23), teachers are prompted to model the role of commas in expressive reading by reading selected sentences and stressing the pauses that follow commas, and then explicitly stating what they have done and how they were signaled to pause by the comma. Students then re-read the passage by participating in one of a variety of activities such as: line by line echo reading, choral reading, trio reading, cross-age reading, or reading along with a tape recording. In this manner, students are instructed in the skill of fluent reading through a scaffolded approach that first models for students and then leads them through assisted practice. This sequence is very much in line with the research regarding best practice in fluency instruction (Rasinski & Padak, 2001).

Finally, each lesson contains some effective follow-up activities that highlight comprehension and vocabulary building. Fluency instruction must be addressed within the context of reading comprehension, given that fluency without high levels of comprehension is of little value (Pikulski & Chard, 2005); Sweeney's follow-up activities do to a limited extent, address the need to be mindful of the overarching importance of reading comprehension. The follow-up activities also highlight the effect of fluent reading. For example, one activity directs students to work as partners. One member of the pair is to read the first paragraph very quickly and the other is to read the second paragraph very slowly. Each time they are asked to evaluate whether or not their partner's reading sounded natural. Together they are to read the final paragraph as though they are talking with someone and then evaluate how that reading compared to the first two. Some of these activities focus on the prosodic features of the text. For example, one lesson (p.50) asks students, after they have read a chant, to explain how it would sound if it had no commas. Another asks students, after they have read a dialogue, to write their own dialogue using the format given in the passage, keeping in mind the mood they wish to evoke and writing the dialogue to create it (p.47). They are then to have another student read their dialogue aloud and evaluate whether or not they have written it in such a manner as to enable the other student to read with the intended expression.

It is evident that Sweeney has done her homework on what research has to say about fluency instruction and has provided in this instructional resource a set of teacher and student-friendly activities that may be utilized in the real-life classroom. While Sweeney does give some thought to less proficient readers in some of the follow-up activities she provides, one area of concern may be that some of the passages may be too difficult for struggling readers. However, with the scaffolded approach she builds into each lesson plan, this concern may well be adequately addressed (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002). Employed as one small component of a much larger balanced literacy

program that gives students access to a variety of texts for a variety of purposes, the lessons set out in this resource book should provide valuable contexts for students to develop the skills they require to read fluently.

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Pikulski, J. J., & Chard, D. J. (2005). Fluency: Bridge between decoding and reading comprehension. *The Reading Teacher, 58*(6), 510-519.

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Rasinski, T. V., & Padak, N. D. (2001). *From phonics to fluency: Effective teaching of decoding and reading fluency in the elementary school*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

Pages: **56** Price: **\$15.99** ISBN: **0-439-58853-7**

Reviewed by by Kimberly Lenters, Doctoral Student, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Thomas, R. Murray (2005). *High-Stakes Testing: Coping with Collateral Damage*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Not so much a study as a well organized argument on the repercussions of the No Child Left Behind Act's use of high-stakes testing. The author, R. Murray Thomas, is an emeritus professor of educational psychology and international education at the University of California-Santa Barbara, and has written books on research and child development. This is not a scholarly investigation of the effects of high-stakes testing programs such as *The Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing* but rather a snapshot of the situation as revealed through contemporary accounts from 2002-2004.

Although Thomas maintains an objective tone, he readily admits in his first chapter that this is an analysis of the failures of high-stakes testing, "because the causes of the failures are what need fixing if schools are to do justice to the students and society in general" (p. 1). In the first chapter, Thomas reviews the history of achievement testing in a very approachable and easily understood chapter for the lay reader. Following this preliminary overview, the book is divided into two parts. In Part I, he focuses on the successive stages of the educational- evaluational process. The topics covered are the school curriculum, the evaluation of learning, the setting of achievement standards and the use of test results. In Part II, he describes each of the stakeholders in the high-stakes testing arena. He lists politicians, educational administrators, public and parents, test makers and givers, and teachers and students in decreasing order of their "levels of authority or official power" in the process (p. 107). In the final chapter, Thomas presents his suggestion for remedies which "might help lawmakers and educators hold students and schools accountable for the quality of learning without generating avoidable damage" (p. 259).

The book is organized in a visually appealing way. Each topic and sub-topic is titled in bold print, questions considered under the topics are also bolded, and illustrative cases are labeled as such. Thomas examines each topic of his hypothesis in chapters 2-11. He gives a cogent summary of the issues precipitated by testing from its relationship to the goals of education in U.S. society, to the role of teachers in evaluation, and the place and validity of testing in the assessment of learning. He also describes the roles of each of the participants in high-stakes testing along with their coping behaviors when challenged by success or failure in their tasks. Each of these is illustrated with a case or cases gleaned mostly from newspaper accounts and occasionally from educational journals, professional journals or government reports.

Thomas's argument and the steps to his conclusions are easy to discern given the layout of the book. The author's use of supporting cases and arguments taken almost exclusively from newspaper reports creates concerns about the authority of his sources and the selection criteria he followed. One wonders if more examples were available from professional or scholarly sources.

Although, the book is written in a conversational tone using vocabulary accessible to all levels of

readers, the chunking of information in the text creates a choppy read. There are also lapses in the editing that make the text occasionally incomprehensible. Examples of these are sentences such as, "school officials announced that all 222 students could move, because it was the school's effort [error]" (p, 86), Another instance is the omission of the word million after the figure \$103 when discussing the amount of federal funding Utah would lose if it refused to join the No-Child program (p. 125).

High-Stakes Testing: Coping with Collateral Damage is an approachable, global analysis of the current issues and participants in the high-stakes testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act during the years 2002-2004 as revealed in the popular media. The issues Thomas describes have been discussed in a more scholarly fashion in *The Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing*. However, the value of this book is that the author includes the perspectives of persons outside of the educational sector: politicians, and federal and state administrators. While not an essential purchase for academic libraries, this book could serve as an introduction to the issues for undergraduate students, and members of the public. This book might also be a useful tool to prompt politicians and legislators towards a deeper reflection of their roles in educational reform by considering passages such as this:

Politicians have little understanding of the multiple factors that affect students' academic success and of how these factors can interact.... Perhaps the fact that, when they themselves were pupils, they had spent more than a dozen years in classrooms, and thus they now believed that they understood what schooling is all about. However, seeing teaching from behind a pupil's desk produces quite a different sort of knowledge than does seeing it from a teacher's perspective (p. 144).

References

Jones, M. G., Jones, B. D., & Hargrove, T.Y. (2003). *The unintended consequences of high-stakes testing*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Pages: **329** Price: **\$29.95** ISBN: **0-8058-5522-X**

Reviewed by Sheila Kirven, Education Services Librarian, New Jersey City University, Jersey City, NJ.

Thompson, Frances McBroom (2004). *Math Essentials, Middle School Level: Lessons and Activities for Test Preparation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.

It is always difficult to review a workbook because they are not designed so much for teachers as for the students who use them to polish or acquire skills. To properly see their value one has to seek out students and ask them their feelings about the book and that is what I did. In this case the student reviews were consistent. They felt that this book was boring. The questions seldom related to what they were interested in, the layout was dull, and they didn't want to use manipulatives because they thought they were for little kids.

The students wanted more insights into how to correct their errors. The good news is that they liked the way the book was organized and could easily follow it. On the other hand they really would have benefited from a glossary as they constantly forgot terms. Now mind you, this is a remedial class, but that is a suggested use for this book.

I always have concerns with a book written for classroom teachers by someone who is not a classroom teacher regardless of the time she has spent working with teachers. There is nothing like being in the trenches on a daily basis to know what works and what does not. The fact that the author is not a classroom teacher does not mean this is a poor workbook. However, since most textbooks have an accompanying workbook and this cost is picked-up from school district funds, there needs to be something special to make me want to spend ten percent of my annual budget on any workbook. I didn't find it with *Math Essentials*, but it is still worthwhile for those who don't have an accompanying workbook or do have a larger budget. By the way, the publisher seems to be stricter than some with waiving copyright to duplicate pages of this book. In a call to the publisher I was told that teachers must get permission to make multiple copies. The publisher would like to sell a copy of this workbook for each student. That would be a notable expense, since at my school a math teacher has at least 170 students.

Thompson does present a wide array of questions, but she does not provide any evidence that what she offers actually has improved student learning and/or test scores. She states, "Teachers must be accountable for what they are teaching to students. The alternative instructional methods and

assessment techniques presented in this book will greatly assist teachers as they seek to align their classroom instruction with their district and state mathematics guidelines and to measure the progress their students make” (p. xix). However, there are no data provided to support this claim.

Overall, the work offers educators a well-organized book that follows the long established step-by-step approach to math from simple to complex. For each objective she writes there are three activities along with a list of common mistakes. There are also a practice test and answer sheets. The activities are divided into developmental and independent practice. This has some good content for teachers who know how to use it. We have a new math teacher at our school and when I showed her the book she was initially enthusiastic. However, after spending time with the Math Essentials she gave it back and said, “Who has time to do these?” In other words, the author has not acquired the experience to show how the work presented could be integrated and help individualize student learning. I think a stronger teacher guide section might be warranted, especially for the manipulative section.

The best use of this book may be to provide a differentiated curriculum for students. It has sections for number operations, quantitative reasoning, proportional and algebraic reasoning, geometry, spatial reasoning, graphing, statistics, probability, and measurement that could be used to provide more depth to a unit of study or extra practice. There are several worksheets, practice test, and answer keys. What I liked the most was a list of the most common mistakes students make. I also appreciated the fact that she offered the students an opportunity to have discussions about what they were learning. The more senses a student uses the better the retention and so Dr. Thompson has done well in that regard.

Pages: **368** Price: **\$32.95** ISBN: : **0-7879-6602-9**

Reviewed by Alan Haskvitz, Cherry Award for Great Teachers, <http://www.reacheverychild.com>

Umstatter, Jack (2005). *Readers at Risk: 160 Activities to Develop Language Arts Skills in the Inclusive Classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Whether as a classroom instructor or a home schooling parent, for anyone working with a child who has special needs or is testing below grade level, this workbook is certainly worth looking at.

Take a few minutes to page through the book to determine if the reproducible activities that focus on vocabulary building and reading comprehension will be of use in your situation. My bet is you'll be delighted with what you find.

The activities are divided into sections on building words, making sense with words, becoming a better reader, and reading comprehension. The comprehension portion of the book is further divided into subject areas that include math and science, social studies, language arts, and biography and current affairs.

Short enough to be used as either beginning or ending activities, the two page reading selections the book features cover high interest subjects as varied as Hip-Hop, skateboarding, Barry Bonds, and video games. The vocabulary sections feature crossword puzzles, magic squares, cloze reading, sequence, and cause-and-effect activities.

Although these activities are aimed at "readers at risk", I think many of the activities featured here would benefit students who are actually on grade level. Designed for students in grades 9-12, this material could just as easily be used for grade level or above middle school students.

Anyone who is involved in substitute teaching might wish to add *Readers at Risk* to their emergency lesson plan kit. Many of these exercises could be lifesavers in situations where the lesson plan left by the absent teacher doesn't quite cover the entire period.

Pages: **317** Price: **\$29.95** ISBN: **0-7879-7549-4**

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



