

3-1-2013

Book Reviews

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Recommended Citation

(2013). Book Reviews. *Perspectives In Learning*, 14 (1). Retrieved from <http://csuepress.columbusstate.edu/pil/vol14/iss1/8>

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Book Reviews

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Introduction

As the instructor of EDCI 7158, Leadership in the Curriculum Change Process, I am fortunate to work with outstanding doctoral students in the curriculum track of CSU's Ed.D. in Curriculum and Leadership program. During the course, students are asked to search for and select a professional book about leadership and curriculum change. They are required to read and critically analyze the book and present their reviews to the class. This semester, we discussed the idea of turning their reviews into a publication for *Perspectives in Learning*, and all of the students were excited about the opportunity to write for the publication and share their book reviews with a wider audience. Their condensed book reviews are presented below in alphabetical order of the names of the authors of each of the selected books. We hope these reviews spark your interest and encourage you to read more about the exciting reforms happening in education.

-Jan G. Burcham, EDCI 7158 Instructor

Ayers, R., & Ayers, W. (2011). *Teaching the taboo: Courage and imagination in the classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Reviewed by Vicki Pheil

In selecting this text, I was immediately drawn to the authors' promise of reading about innovative strategies, creative solutions, and real-life examples of how teachers have delivered courage in their practice and sparked imagination for their

students. Even after the introduction, I was reminded of the film *Shawshank Redemption* and Morgan Freeman's character, Red, who stated, "Get busy living or get busy dying." I began to think that, as teachers, we should get busy inspiring or get out of the profession. This book was going to be hopeful! I was sure that with this book, I would find my own well of encouragement from which to draw for those days when I feel burdened by the daily tasks of teaching. While this may be true for many pages in

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the text, the overall tone seems to discount many current practices in education and, instead, tries to instill a rebellious attitude against the poor practices of today. While questioning and challenging the how and why of our teaching are important activities I hope all educators conduct, the way the Ayers present their viewpoints in this book seems at times antagonistic.

The text is easy to read and includes several real-life examples that portray the ideal teaching methods the authors suggest. The introduction provides the framework for the work, explaining that, for true learning to occur, a leveling of power in the classroom needs to happen. Additionally, they explain that today's education has become a "commodity" reducing teaching to a narrow curriculum and developing a prescribed social order. The most engaging statement in the introduction was the reminder that many teachers and students see *now* as a stopping point in history, and in doing so, we sacrifice any opportunity of change and choice. Subsequent chapters tackle the transformation of marginalized populations, calling on educators to recognize the crossroads where we stand and pointing to the direction of change, addressing the needs of the global society; the use of texts from everyday life, in multiple formats from various cultures; the notion of racial responsibility; the use of social context to provide authentic learning opportunities; and the practice of allowing the classroom to become more than a single voice, with no identifiable authority of truth, but more as a learning environment where all are valued participants with knowledge to contribute.

My biggest concern while reading the book was that the authors seem to expect the readers to suspend the knowledge of how classrooms in most public school systems operate today. Anyone who follows the news or personally knows someone in

education knows that teachers are being held to higher measures of accountability more and more, standardized testing has become a normal event (in some instances on a weekly basis), and students are relegated to assignments and tasks that are often unrelated to personal interests. While the degree of challenges classroom teachers face varies depending upon the setting and administration, showing bravery as described and called upon by the Ayers brothers is difficult to manage and risky to fully execute. In these days of a depressed economy, it is easy to understand why teachers do not want to be seen as the rebel, the loud one, the teacher who veers outside the standards, the champion of alternative thinking, all viewpoints in contrast to the prescriptive teaching of standards.

If you read this text looking for ways to enhance your current teaching, for ideas to inspire you to teach the individual, and for a boost to your own motivation for teaching outside the lines, you will find exactly that. If you approach the text with an administrative or policy eye that is in favor of current standards and testing, it is likely you will become agitated and view the Ayers as protagonists who are trying to stir trouble, to incite riots, and negate the good qualities of standards and testing. Perhaps the best approach is to read the book as I did; as an educator at heart who is still concerned with improving teaching and learning. But even so, after reading the book and finding a bit of antagonistic attitude, I was also able to find inspiration and motivation to teach the individual in unique and global-thinking ways, and that is good enough for me. "We may not be able to do everything, but we can do something, and something is where we begin" (p. 127). Unlike Red in the film *Shawshank Redemption*, we have no alternative. Let's get busy teaching.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2004). *Whatever it takes: How professional learning communities respond when kids don't learn.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Reviewed by Lynn B. Akin

I was given the book, *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn* (2004), by my middle school principal for a book study that was never completed by our staff, and the only portion I had read was the chapter on middle schools. Because I was intrigued by the idea of helping students who are struggling, I thought it would be a good idea to return to the book to see if I could learn more. The goal of the authors is to show educators how schools at different levels responded when students were not succeeding, and because of their success when implementing the Professional Learning Community model, the authors hope to entice other schools to begin a similar program to help all students achieve success.

Most people assume that a Professional Learning Community, or PLC, involves professionals learning new strategies for instruction. However, a PLC, as the authors describe it, is a group of professionals in a school, including all adults within the school setting, who get together and plan how students can receive extended time and support to learn critical concepts. *Whatever It Takes* uses the successes at four schools, Adlai Stevenson High School, Freeport Intermediate School, Boones Mill Elementary School, and Los Peñasquitos Academy, to show how students need extra time and support to gain success in the classroom. Through the use of Professional Learning Communities, all four schools have shown tremendous growth. Adlai Stevenson High School now has a combined D/F grade rate of less than 5%, continued

improvement in all academic indicators over the last 20 years, the highest number of students in the world who write AP exams, and has been awarded the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon Award four times. Freeport Intermediate has turned around from a school of high poverty and low achievement to being an exemplary school in Texas where over 90% of the students meet or exceed standards on state assessments with no gaps in achievement based on socio-economic status, race, or ethnicity.

The authors argue that while there are many strategies and interventions used to help students, what students need most is extra time and support. With extended time and support, students can begin to see small successes happen that lead to larger and larger successes. For example, at Adlai Stevenson High School, a "loss-of-privilege" concept keeps students' behaviors in check while giving them extra time for tutoring or completing assignments. They must earn privileges such as being able to drive to school, extended lunchtime or the ability to go off-campus for lunch, among others. These privileges increase as students achieve and as they move upwards in their education. At Boones Mill Elementary, all adults (whether the student has the adult as a teacher or not) are involved in helping students learn. One of the interventions put in place involved hiring extra personnel for tutoring, and students were scheduled for tutorial time that was not in conflict with instructional blocks or recess. The tutoring provided supplementary instruction and test-taking strategies, or the tutor could supervise an activity while the regular classroom teacher worked with identified students.

For those looking for ways to incorporate or learn more about Professional Learning Communities, this book will give you much information. The "loss-of-privilege" concept is particularly attractive

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for those at the secondary level, while the Save One Student (SOS) Program, the Student Success Team, the Math Booster Club, the 6-to-6 Program, and Reading Recovery are interventions discussed for the elementary level. Additionally, Richardson's Eight Step Improvement Process in the Total Quality Management system uses assessment data to plan instruction for students who have not mastered key concepts and provide enrichment for those who have. The Appendix has sixty pages of helpful rubrics, lists, forms, and documents to aid schools at all levels in moving their PLCs to a more effective level and accomplish the one goal we ALL have: To do whatever it takes to help ALL students find success.

Corrigan, M., Grove, D., Vincent, P. (2011). *Multi-dimensional education: A common sense approach to data-driven thinking*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Company.

Reviewed by Sherry Huckaby

As a former reading coach, an essential part of my job was facilitating the use of data to make effective, data-driven decisions in the classroom. Personally, I have a high level of interest in data and data analysis. Even though there may be personal appeal to data for many teachers, the lack of training in making effective, data-driven decisions often leaves them cringing at the sound of the word "data". Teachers also often view the practice of using data analysis to drive instruction as cold, detached, and unable to accurately depict the whole child. Good educators know there is more to teaching a child than simply addressing the academic data. Because of this, I chose to read and review *Multi-Dimensional Education: A Common Sense Approach to Data-Driven Thinking* by Michael Corrigan, Doug Grove, and Philip

Vincent published in 2011 by the Sage Company in Thousand Oaks, California.

In their book, Corrigan, Grove, and Vincent (2011) present a data collection strategy that aims to produce data to address the needs of the whole child. The purpose of this book is to provide a framework for collecting data on seven critical areas (or dimensions) that influence the education of the whole child in an effort to make lasting change and better-informed instructional decisions. This commonsense approach to collecting school data involves utilizing more than just the traditional quantitative data to make effective instructional decisions. Because students are dynamic and unique, it is impossible to capture and reveal their strengths and weaknesses from just one test result such as high stakes testing. The multi-dimensional approach involves a mixed methods collection framework to provide deeper insight into the strengths and weaknesses of a school. The seven dimensions of the multi-dimensional approach, as identified by Corrigan, Grove, and Vincent (2011), are community engagement, curriculum expectations, developmental perspectives, educational attitudes, faculty fidelity, leadership potential, and school climate. Corrigan, Grove, and Vincent (2011) claim the seven dimensions are attributes evident in highly effective schools. Each of the seven dimensions is described in detail in the book. Explanations are given as to how the seven dimensions play a role in improving achievement. In addition to explaining the seven dimensions that facilitate a more holistic perspective, the book also discusses how these seven dimensions are the driving force behind the big four C's of achievement (curriculum, climate, community, and character).

The book also provides examples of frameworks from other schools that have completed the data collection process using

the seven dimensions. These examples aid the reader in understanding the types of information that will or can be generated from this data collection approach. The reader is given possible locations to find data needed to complete the seven dimensions framework. The book also contains concise rubrics and surveys designed to facilitate the collection of information and data to complete a strengths and weaknesses framework table. Information contained in the table is then used to develop a plan that includes identifying and sharing strengths and weaknesses, setting goals, and developing a timeline to improve student achievement.

Unfortunately, no empirical evidence from prior research is given in the book to support the claim that all seven areas of the multi-dimensional approach are essential. The book mentions the seven dimensions are evident in effective schools. However, there was no indication as to how that information was derived. In addition, no empirical evidence is provided of prior research from schools that have utilized the multi-dimensional approach and been successful. The case to support the multi-dimensional approach would be greatly strengthened if this supporting research were added.

In this current data-driven decision making frenzy, many schools are actually inundated with data and lack the tools to organize and utilize it effectively. Without having the tools to use the data in an effective manner to develop a plan of action, they are left with a plethora of data and no strategies to bring about change. This book can assist with providing the tools to handle the massive amounts of data. There is also agreement with the idea that improving student achievement encompasses more factors than merely improving instruction. School climate, stakeholder perceptions, leadership, and curriculum all play a pivotal role in maintaining a healthy school.

Therefore, collecting data concerning all of these multi-dimensional areas is important. This book gives schools an excellent starting point on collecting holistic data to support data-driven decision-making. However, be prepared to seek out additional resources for information on the “next steps” of implementing research-based strategies to bring about change.

Lengel, J. G. (2013). *Education 3.0: Seven steps to better schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Reviewed by Tammy Person

Technology is advancing rapidly every day, and as a result, our world is in a state of change. The changes in technology have an impact on day-to-day functioning as well as how students are educated. Technology is being used in schools to help teachers teach, to help students learn, and to prepare everyone for the world outside of school. I chose this book because of my interest in the use of technology in education. I believe that technology can be used to promote educational reform and make learning experiences more meaningful and engaging for students.

Education 3.0 provides an overview of the history of education and methods that have been used to educate students over the years. It is noted that today’s world of work is diverse, requiring the accomplishment of numerous tasks simultaneously and the use of technology to accomplish goals. Schools in the past changed in response to what was

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happening in the world. The education of students was adjusted to more closely match the world in general and the world of work, but that change has greatly slowed as can be seen in schools where students are not performing tasks the same as people do in the modern workplace. Descriptions of schools are provided that show antiquated methods being used to teach that do not mirror the world in which we live and work. Skills that students in the 21st century should have, including the ability to work autonomously, think critically, and lead through influence, are outlined. The authors make the case that technology and teaching methods can be used to teach these skills to students. In order for schools to do this, they must undergo change to begin to function as effective, 21st century schools. *Education 3.0* highlights the need for change and outlines how to adjust schools to better educate students and prepare them for their futures.

Lengel outlines seven steps that should be considered when updating schools and making them more modern (called Education 3.0). The seven steps include: recognizing the need for change, setting the vision, scanning the system, planning for action, adopting the plan, building Education 3.0, and monitoring and refreshing. Schools need to undergo major transformations to use Education 3.0, and they need to come up with ways to operate under the vision of a modern school. Input and support of those in the school building as well as those who have a stake in the field of education (parents, school boards, and the local government) are important in the process. Once support is in place, the plan for change can begin. It was noted that, as schools undergo change, they should monitor progress and be prepared to make revisions to their plans as necessary.

I found *Education 3.0* to be very engaging and informative. It clearly

demonstrated how some schools are missing the mark in preparing students for college or the workplace and how technology in schools is often not being used so that students receive the maximum benefits. The steps leading the implementation of Education 3.0 provided a complete picture of what schools can do to perform better and more efficiently. The inclusion of school personnel as well as other stakeholders (such as students, parents, and others in the community) in helping schools to change and become more effective is essential. If schools consider this book as they attempt to change their methods and practices, it can give a clear sense of what modern schools should be and how they should operate. *Education 3.0* provides a step-by-step method for taking schools through the change process to move to effectively educating students and preparing them for life.

Levine, E. (2001). *One kid at a time: Big lessons from a small school*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Reviewed by Saoussan Maarouf

As a teacher, I understand the importance of staying current and up-to-date with knowledge of the latest educational research and strategies. Teachers are required, now more than ever, to accommodate students' different learning styles, diverse backgrounds, and academic abilities. Therefore, I believe this book is a "must read" by all teachers and educators who want to make a difference in their students' lives.

One Kid at a Time, Big Lessons from a Small School tells the true story of two educators, Dennis Littky and Eliot Washor, who serve as co-directors of the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (Met). The Met is a public high school that was opened in Providence, Rhode Island

in 1996. Eliot Levine, the author of this book, shares with his readers the results of a two-year study of the Met and its student-centered curriculum. Levine takes his readers on an exciting journey behind the scenes at the school to examine an education reform model that is derived from students' interests and needs.

Students in the Met do not attend classes, nor do they take tests. Students learn through internships and real life experiences and projects. Teachers in this "unique" school do not assign grades to students but offer detailed written reports that describe students' performances. Every teacher in the Met works closely with 14 students for a period of four years and provides them with tailored curriculum that is derived from each student's interests. The curriculum targets "five learning goals: communication, social reasoning, empirical reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and personal qualities" (Levine, 2001, p. xvii). The teachers, supported by the students' learning teams (parents, students, and internship mentors), meet quarterly to discuss the students' needs and adjust the curriculum accordingly in order to help students achieve their learning goals. Students in the Met are selected randomly regardless of their economic or academic levels. Therefore, the student population in this school is diverse and unique.

Eliot Levine in *One Kid at a Time, Big Lessons from a Small School* shows strong support for the Met and its directors, teachers, and students. The overall purpose of his book is to shed light on the Met's successful model that provides "the best education for all students from all backgrounds" (p. xx). Levine believes that the Met provides creativity and innovation in the area of school reform at a time when the future of public education is so terribly bleak. Levine suggests that the "Met's ambitious reforms and early successes merit

a careful look from everyone interested in improving education" (p. xx).

As a teacher, I strongly agree that students should learn through their interests.

However, the biggest challenge that faces teachers in schools similar to the Met is having students who are not interested in one or more subject areas such as math or history. Should the school allow students to graduate without basic math knowledge? How can teachers intentionally integrate history into a student's personalized curriculum without interfering with the school's philosophy? These are issues with which the teachers at the Met are grappling.

Unlike other public schools that use the state's mandated standards and tests to assess students' learning, the Met's teachers assess their students' knowledge based on the school's learning goals. However, these goals are broad and lack clear definitions. The "staff and parents agree that more clarity would make it easier to plan and assess student work, but the school has not yet provided that clarity" (Levine, 2001, p.83). Without clear definitions of the learning goals, the Met has no valid and reliable measures to assess students' academic performances. The school's success was determined based on the percentage of the Met students who got accepted to college. The author wrote the book five years after the school was established and, therefore, he did not have at that time information about the numbers of Met students who continued their studies and successfully graduated from college. Such data will certainly provide a clearer evidence of the success or failure of the Met's education reform model.

Finally, *One Kid at a Time: Big Lessons from a Small School* is a valuable book that would be a good read for every educator. Educators will find strategies and approaches to integrate into their classrooms. The Met does not provide

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solutions for all our education dilemmas, but it certainly provides an intriguing education model that other schools should definitely into consideration.

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Tammy Person is a School Psychologist for the Department of Defense Schools. She has a Master's in Counseling Psychology and a Specialist Degree in Education. She is currently pursuing her Doctorate in Curriculum and Leadership at Columbus State University.

Vicki Pheil is the Director of Field Placement with the Department of Education at LaGrange College in LaGrange, Georgia. She is a National Board Certified Teacher in Early Adolescence English Language Arts and taught middle grades language arts and science for almost ten years in the Troup County School System. Vicki is currently enrolled in the doctoral program at Columbus State University.