

## Reading Comprehension: New Directions for Classroom Practice

John D. McNeil  
Glenview, Illinois

Scott, Foresman and Company, 1984

—Reviewed by John W. Myers, Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tennessee.

In his preface, John McNeil suggests that elementary reading teachers have done little in past years to come to grips with teaching comprehension. Today, McNeil says, things have changed; teachers have become more aware of comprehension as a process, and they are looking for ways to teach such skills effectively.

McNeil draws upon current research in cognitive psychology, linguistics, and other disciplines to analyze and clarify the "new" approaches to understanding the comprehension process and teaching it in the classroom. The text is intended for use in undergraduate and graduate level reading courses, but it should aid anyone wishing to understand the comprehension process. The book's greatest strength lies in its balance of clearly presented theory and well-documented practical applications. The final chapter of the text is titled "Coda," and may well be the best place to begin, since it provides the theoretical framework for all that McNeil says. The author sees comprehension as an interactive process between reader and text, a process that creates and redefines meaning according to various "schemata" held by the reader.

The first chapter introduces the reader to schema theory and explains its applications to the classroom. McNeil cites current pertinent research, then moves on to practical strategies for teaching, such as semantic mapping. As with all of his chapters, this one closes with a brief summary and a list of "Useful Reading." Chapters 2 and 3 continue to define his "constructivist" approach, dealing respectively with creating active readers and with the assimilation process.

Chapter 4 deals with accommodation, the restructuring of schemata, and provides models for classroom use. Chapter 5 introduces the process of metacognition. Chapter 6 deals with the teaching of vocabulary from an interactive perspective, while Chapter 7 offers ways to improve sentence comprehension. Chapter 8 focuses on comprehension of different types of discourse, principally narrative and expository text.

McNeil's book is an excellent resource for courses in reading methods. While it focuses on the elementary grades, there is much here for secondary level teachers as well. McNeil has done an outstanding job of explaining clearly the complexities of schema theory, and showing its practical applications. The work is well organized, well researched, and covers well all aspects of comprehension. It even touches briefly on some of the new computer software that can assist teachers in building comprehension skills. *Reading Comprehension* is the best on the topic I have seen in some time. It should be of great value to anyone concerned with current effective approaches to the teaching of comprehension.

Available from Scott, Foresman and Company, 1900 E. Lake Ave., Glenview, IL 60025.

## Learning and Teaching Style in Theory and Practice

Kathleen A. Butler  
Maynard, Massachusetts  
Gabriel Systems, Inc., 1984

—Reviewed by Shirley McFaul, Assistant Principal, Friends School, Baltimore, Maryland

Focusing on the concept of "style," Butler offers a manual that interprets and applies Anthony Gregorc's model of learning style. The text is conceived of as a bridge from understanding to classroom application. While Gregorc's learning style instrument is not included in this book (it must be ordered separately), *Learning and Teaching Style* gives a thorough de-

scription of the perceptual (abstract and concrete) and ordering (sequential and random) abilities addressed in this model. The author deals not only with adult learning style, but also with teaching style, student style, and instructional style. In the latter, she offers her suggestions for "style differentiated instruction." No research base is reviewed, but this guide will help teachers and administrators interested in analyzing and applying one approach to learning style.

Available from Gabriel Systems, Inc., Box 357, Maynard, MA 01754, for \$24.95.

## Self-Concept, Self-Esteem, and the Curriculum

James A. Beane and Richard P. Lipka  
Boston  
Allyn and Bacon, 1984

—Reviewed by Edmund C. Short, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania

This book provides sources of ideas and guidelines for developing what might be called a self-enhancing school. It begins with a look at theory and research on enhancing self-perceptions, examining ways that school climate, rewards and punishment, peer groups, achievement, parents, teachers, and other institutional features affect student self-perceptions. Curriculum planning, at both the overall program level and for specific teaching-learning situations, is discussed in terms of self-concept, self-esteem, and value dimensions. Sample resource units are given to demonstrate how commitment to enhancing student self-perceptions can be incorporated into objectives, subject matter, and activities of typical curriculum topics. The book ends with a rationale for the self-enhancing school and its potential for the future based on state of the art theory, research, and practice. Included are helpful checklists for assessing schools and teachers, and suggestions and models for research.

Available from Allyn and Bacon, 7 Wells Avenue, Newton, MA 02159, for \$12.76.

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## Classroom Management for Secondary Teachers

Edmund T. Emmer, Carolyn M. Everson,  
Julie P. Sanford, Barbara S. Clements,  
and Murray E. Worsbam  
Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey:  
Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984.

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—Reviewed by B. F. Steere, Department of Education, Missouri Southern State College, Joplin, Missouri.

The text is noticeably based on the authors' research, experiences, and observations in over 300 elementary and secondary classrooms. Knowing of the authors' research findings, I was disappointed to find that the content was not fortified by references to research studies—an addition which would have added credibility to this very practical publication.

The worth of this book, especially for beginning teachers, is significantly greater because of the emphasis placed on preventive discipline. Much attention is given to such topics as getting the school year off to a good start, choosing rules and procedures, monitoring, methods for ensuring accountability, managing special groups, and keeping students on-task.

Each of the nine chapters contains some combination of checklists, suggested activities, and case studies. The book is a noteworthy addition to the study of classroom management and teaching effectiveness.

Available from Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632, for \$10.95.

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## Academic Precocity: Aspects of Its Development

Camilla Persson Benbow and Julian C.  
Stanley, editors  
Baltimore

The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

—Reviewed by Mary M. Frasier, University of Georgia, Athens.

*Academic Precocity* should be read not only by educators, elementary through college, but by many parents as well. It is an important book for several reasons. First, it signals a major effort to longitudinally evaluate the

effectiveness of *radical acceleration*, a method for educating able children and youth. Second, though it primarily speaks about the population designated as "gifted," there are important implications for the education of all children. One implication, for instance, concerns the wisdom of tenaciously holding on to the practice of age-graded placement. Third, it describes a need for closer cooperation among educational institutions at all levels, which would benefit both children and educators.

In 1971 Julian Stanley and his associates formally initiated an investigation into the development of mathematical reasoning ability through a project called the *Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth* (SMPY). Using the Scholastic Aptitude Test—Mathematics as the primary identification measure, the goal was to find youth who at an early age were able to reason extremely well with simple mathematical concepts. "students who even before taking or completing the first year of algebra would reason mathematically much better than the average male 12th grader does," according to Stanley. *Academic Precocity*, the seventh in a series of volumes, reports eight years of experience with and evaluation of the SMPY project. It presents revised and updated results from a 1980 overview symposium convened to review accomplishments of the project and to discuss guidelines for the future.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the history of SMPY, its development, and its plans for long-term followups. According to Stanley, the power of the SMPY model is affirmed by replications and adaptations of its design across the country. Examples are the Duke Program, the talent search begun in Arizona, and the Midwest Talent Search.

The educational accomplishments of three of SMPY's ablest prodigies are also recounted in Chapter 1. Stanley concludes that their accomplishments exemplify the kind of educational progress that is possible when curricular arrangements are flexible enough to accommodate the needs of extremely

able students. He points out the cost effectiveness of radical acceleration in time and money.

Chapter 2 presents the findings from the longitudinal study, which is an evaluation of the first three of six talent searches conducted by SMPY. Chapters three, four, seven, and nine further explore aspects of these findings. Included are discussions on the manifestation of creative behavior among SMPY participants; the effects of teaching math at a fast pace; the results of an accelerated mathematics program for girls; and the effects of acceleration on social and emotional development. Chapters 5, 8, and 10 provide a review of three programs replicating the SMPY model. Chapter 6 describes efforts to assist students in scoring well on selected Advanced Placement examinations. Finally, Chapter 11 discusses the need for educators to consider an eclectic approach when developing educational programs for the gifted.

Several messages await the reader of *Academic Precocity*. The major message that Stanley presents is that radical acceleration is not only appropriate but successful when used to educate highly motivated mathematically precocious youth.

The second significant message is the need for more cooperation among educational agencies at all levels if the highly gifted are to be adequately served. The third message is the need to be ever mindful that gifted children have different needs. Their appropriate education must be based on a careful analysis of those needs and must then be followed by specially designed educational programs.

The review of the SMPY project is overwhelmingly positive. The identification methods employed are reported as effective. The treatment measure—specifically, radical acceleration—is deemed to be an effective educational approach to use with intellectually able youth. The transportability of SMPY's design is confirmed through reports on successful replications in various educational settings.

Reports from participants reveal that a majority felt positive about their

experience and that participation in the program "had helped them educationally at least some" (p. 22). No evidence of negative effects of acceleration on social and emotional development was found and, in fact, some evidence of positive effect was presented. Only in the study concerned with the manifestations of creativity among SMPY students were the results ambiguous and inconclusive, this owing to methodological limitations described by the researchers.

Benbow concludes that data from the longitudinal study support that SMPY met its goal of helping its participants educationally "while not detracting from their social and/or emotional development" (p. 26). She adds that this was as much as the SMPY staff wanted to accomplish, for "its small staff concentrated their efforts on the ablest, best-motivated students among the group" (p. 26).

The reader may still question the effects of radical acceleration on less-motivated students. Without detracting from its goal, it would have been helpful if the SMPY study had sought more qualitative data from students who traveled down such a dramatically different and nontraditional educational path. Educators must understand the needs of those children who cannot handle the stress of acceleration.

The late Halbert Robinson's report (Chapter 8) describes the Early Entrance Program (an adaptation of the SMPY model) and attempts made to attend to the social and emotional needs of participants by providing guidance and counseling for students and their families. Rich data are offered regarding problems and methods that were used to remedy them. The reader thus gains a more complete idea of how to deal with the youth who can benefit from a program of radical acceleration.

Feldhusen's discussion (Chapter 11) confirms the need for a counseling and guidance component to accommodate the total educational needs of gifted, creative, talented, and high ability students. He presents a broader view of radical acceleration when he argues that "an eclectic, or integrative approach, utilizing all possible resources, is most appropriate for meeting the needs of gifted students" (p. 192). He describes various approaches to acceleration derived from the needs of students and cautions against taking too narrow a view of acceleration and enrichment.

In an earlier discussion, Benbow and Stanley (1980) stated: "We favor the hypothesis that sex differences in achievement in and attitude toward mathematics result from superior male mathematics ability, which may in turn be related to greater male ability in spatial tasks" (p. 1294). While a number of critical questions were raised regarding this issue, only a limited discussion of it is offered in *Academic Precocity*. Those who have raised questions regarding the assertion of superior male mathematical ability are certain to still raise those questions after reading this book. But readers should gain many insights into the issues of attempting to match the learning environment with the needs of precocious learners. Debate on the merits of radical acceleration are certain to continue. This book offers additional data to take that debate to another level.

Available from the Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD 21218, for \$22.50.

#### Reference

- Benbow, C., and Stanley, J. "Sex Differences in Mathematical Ability: Fact or Artifact?" *Science* 210, 12 (December 1980): 1292-1294.

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## Class Size and Instruction

Leonard S. Caben, Nikola Filby, Gail McCutcheon, Diane Kyle  
New York, New York  
Longman, Inc., 1983.

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—Reviewed by Art Steller, Superintendent, Mercer County Public Schools, Princeton, West Virginia.

Most research studies on class size focus on the search for a magic number for ideal learning, classroom management, or some other worthwhile educational factor. The study reported in this book addresses how class size affects instruction. Readers familiar with the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study will find meaningful comparisons with this investigation. Perhaps the strongest feature is the authors' view of how to conduct research about teaching and learning.

The bulk of this volume is composed of vivid descriptions of the two schools and four classrooms studied. Such abundant detail of common occurrences, despite being well written, will interest only a limited audience. The classroom observation instruments and techniques in this work have wider applicability.

The authors approached the final chapters with the pragmatic sense so often associated with practitioners. For instance, recognizing the limitations of school funding, they propose that educators reduce class size for parts of the day. Researchers will find the methodology and design of this study interesting, although not revolutionary, while the implications for practice could lead to minor instructional improvement. Solidly based in reality, no panaceas are offered in *Class Size and Instruction*.

Available from Longman, Inc., 1560 Broadway, New York, NY 10036, for \$25.00 for cloth.

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