

The Teacher

GRETCHEN SCHWARZ

Questioning Conventional Wisdom

As the end-of-school frenzy was waning, a friend and I stopped to invite a colleague to go to lunch. He declared he had no time and asked us impatiently, holding up a batch of papers, "Do I have to fill these out, too?" "No," we answered, "but those are the administrator evaluations. You ought to do them." Our colleague threw the forms into the trash can, and we went on to lunch.

Later, thinking about his action, I got upset. This teacher is bright, hard-working, and creative; he cares about his students and brings tremendous enthusiasm for his subject into his classroom. Yet he has accepted one of the myths of teaching: "Administrators and fads come and go, but my classroom is my kingdom."

The conventional wisdom of teaching consists of many of these old sayings, which are handed down from veterans to novices and repeated like a liturgy, year after year. Such common attitudes may be comforting at times, but unless we begin to question these assumptions, teaching will not be a true profession.

Much has been written lately about the growing knowledge base for teaching. However, practitioners need to find access to this information; and perhaps we first need to exercise the kind of critical thinking that distinguishes mere workers from genuine professionals. Workers can concern themselves only with their own place on the assembly line, following management instructions as they must. Professionals concern themselves with the whole workplace and ask questions about practice and purpose. Workers can do one task, collect their pay, and go home. Professionals take on more responsibility as they demand more decision-making power.

My responsibility, then, (exhausting as it is) does *not* end at my classroom door. When I have the chance to fill out a survey from the district or am invited to give feedback to our building administrators, I need to do so. If I assume no one in power cares, then surely my input *won't* count. What happens "out there" does affect me in

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my own classroom and vice versa. In addition, if I want to be more effective, I need to find out what other teachers are doing and thinking.

There are many other areas in which the conventional wisdom must be questioned so that professional growth and empowerment can occur. For instance, most teachers assume that ability grouping is a good thing; it seems to make sense and makes the job more manageable. Yet, in a survey of the literature, Passow (1988) shows that the benefits of ability grouping for the student are far from clear. Passow notes that an appropriate curriculum and flexibility of movement for students are important; ability grouping, in and of itself, may accomplish nothing or may even be harmful. Teachers also need to question new buzzwords—the conventional wisdom of the future—like "time-on-task" or "focus." Doesn't it matter if the task is worth doing? What if we want students to create their own expectations or tasks?

In short, professionals act for themselves and their profession; they are not merely acted upon. They seek greater understanding and responsibility, not less. In the spirit of professionalism, therefore, we must continually gather new information and challenge conventional wisdom. □

Reference

- Passow, A.H. (1988). "Issues of Access to Knowledge: Grouping and Tracking." In *Critical Issues in Curriculum*, edited by L.N. Tanner. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, pp. 205–225.

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Reviews

New Voices: Immigrant Students in U.S. Public Schools

NCAS Research and Policy Report
Boston:

The National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988

—Reviewed by K. Paul Kasambira, Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois

This report identifies a host of problems that children and parents of the great immigration wave of the 1970s-80s are facing in U.S. public schools: culture shock, racism, language barriers, standardized tests, and lack of support services. The report recommends specific courses of action for the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Justice, state and local education agencies, teacher training institutions, and communities. A "must" for curriculum developers, school counselors, teachers, administrators, and teacher educators.

Available from The National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 103 Boylston St., Ste. 737, Boston, MA 02116.

Science in Cinema: Teaching Science Fact Through Science Fiction Films

LeRoy W. Dubeck, Suzanne E. Mosbier,
and Judith E. Boss
New York:

Teachers College Press, 1988

—Reviewed by Sidney Besvinick, University of Miami, Florida

Good science fiction has always built on sound scientific principles. The thesis of *Science in Cinema* is that the 34 sci-fi films the authors have chosen provide opportunities for teachers and students to identify the scientific principles on which the stories are based and to challenge the validity of the inferences that go beyond reasonable data.

The authors provide a plot summary

and scientific commentary for each film and list distributors of 16 mm and videocassette copies. Ten films are given more detailed presentations, including classroom activities, additional discussion topics, literary commentary, and a bibliography. Fortunately, several of the films (*The Fly*, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, *Close Encounters*) are not true science fiction but fantasy films with little scientific credibility. Teachers and students, therefore, will have to be selective in the films they choose to analyze.

Middle school and high school teachers who work with science clubs or with any students willing to accept a challenge will find this book useful.

Available from Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1234 Amsterdam Ave., New York, NY 10027.

Planning Educational Systems: A Results-Based Approach

Roger Kaufman
Lancaster, Pa.:

Technomic Publishing Co., Inc., 1988

—Reviewed by Gerald D. Bailey, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas

This detailed guide to building and managing educational systems takes the reader through the stages of planning, analyzing information, and implementing the results. The book's organization proceeds from simple to complex. The easy-to-read narrative incorporates ideas from education as well as from business and industry. The most important section deals with needs assessment; this section is mandatory reading for educators responsible for school planning.

While the generic nature of school planning is the strength of the book, it also becomes a weakness. Those readers wishing to apply this information to site-based management or whose schools are small/rural as opposed to large/urban will see limitations in the general nature of the information. In the main, however, this is a valuable book for superintendents, staff devel-

opment directors, and curriculum directors interested in school planning or improvement.

Available from Technomic Publishing Company, Inc., 851 New Holland Ave., Box 3535, Lancaster, PA 17604.

Classroom Teaching Skills: A Primer

Kenneth D. Moore
New York:

Random House, 1988

Excellence in Teaching with Seven Laws

Carl Shafer
Grand Rapids, Mich.:
Baker Book House, 1988

—Reviewed by Sheila Rezak, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana

Both *Classroom Teaching Skills* and *Excellence in Teaching* will help teachers at elementary, secondary, and adult levels. Because the books take different approaches in expressing the ideas, however, individual readers may prefer one book over the other.

Generally, *Classroom Teaching Skills* is more detailed. It teaches pre-instructional skills such as writing objectives and planning the presentation and instructional skills such as reinforcement, questioning, and classroom management. The book provides bibliographies, an index, a glossary, and review questions with answer keys. This work could easily be used as a supplementary textbook in methods and educational psychology classes.

Excellence in Teaching is an abridgment of John Milton Gregory's 1884 publication, *The Seven Laws of Teaching*. Readers are introduced to laws regarding the teacher and the teaching process, the learner and the learning process, the lesson, the language, and review and application. Although the principles presented by Gregory apply to any kind of teaching, occasional references to teachers in Christian education reflect Gregory's background as a Baptist minister. Carl Shafer's ver-

sion has made the language more readable for today's educators. There is no bibliography, glossary, or index.

As I compared both books, I found myself reading one of the teaching laws and then referring to Moore's work to find specific ways to accomplish the law. For instance, Shafer's publication advises the teacher to create interest in a subject when presenting a lesson, and Moore's work describes ways to create that interest. Both books deal with gestures, but Moore discusses body language to a greater extent. Both publications are worth reading; together, they provide both a theoretical and a practical guide to excellent teaching skills.

Classroom Teaching Skills: A Primer is available from Random House, Inc., 201 East 50th St., New York, NY 10022. *Excellence in Teaching with Seven Laus* is available from Baker Book House, P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287, for \$4.95.

The Morality of Democratic Citizenship

R. Freeman Butts
Calabasas, Calif.

Center for Civic Education, 1988

—Reviewed by William Schubert, University of Illinois at Chicago.

In *The Revival of Civic Learning* (Phi Delta Kappa 1980), renowned educational historian R. Freeman Butts showed that studying history can lead to a sense of civic responsibility. In his latest work he goes further, arguing compellingly that democratic citizenship is a moral responsibility.

Butts develops 12 "tables of civism" (elements of democratic citizenship) in two categories: *unum* (justice, equality, authority, participation, truth, and patriotism); and *pluribus* (freedom, diversity, privacy, due process, property, and human rights). A central section of the book is devoted to ways to teach about the Constitution so as to inform public debate. Most important, the book addresses the need for children, youth, and their teachers to study how we can live together in this world.

Available from the Center for Civic Education, 5146 Douglas Fir Rd., Calabasas, CA 91302, for \$14.95.

A Free and Ordered Space: The Real World of the University

A. Bartlett Giamatti
New York

W.W. Norton and Company, 1988

—Reviewed by Roy R. Pellicano, Brooklyn, New York

Reminding us of the distinction between education and schooling, Giamatti explains the purpose of the liberal arts as well as the need for a community of ideas and actions that allows them to flourish. A proponent of an ordered, free, and open marketplace for ideas and research, Giamatti adds his voice to those who have warned against turning schools into vocational training centers where we promise our students a "good job" if they acquire a diploma.

The author advises us to transcend engagement with the particulars of day-to-day planning in order to reflect on the importance of higher-order cognitive and affective skills, as well as on the role modeling we provide through the norms, functions, and structures we create and maintain in our schools. Highly recommended for all.

Available from W.W. Norton and Company, 500 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10110, for \$19.95.

Curriculum Change in the Primary School Since 1945

Peter Cunningham
Philadelphia

The Falmer Press, 1988

—Reviewed by Kathy Fite, Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas

Primary education in Great Britain reflects many recent social, economic, and political changes. The author describes how the programs of today are very different from those that existed before 1945. Readers familiar with the history of education in America will find it interesting to compare parallel changes in British views toward child development, curriculum, methodology, and educational environments.

Available from The Falmer Press, Taylor and Francis, Inc., 242 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19106-1906, for \$44.00 hardcover, \$22.00 softcover.

American Children's Folklore

Simon J. Bronner
Little Rock, Ark.

August House, Inc., 1988

—Reviewed by James Squire, Executive Consultant, Silver Burdett & Ginn, Needham Heights, Massachusetts

Those who have relished earlier compilations of Anglo-American children's songs and games will be delighted by this authoritative new collection: songs and rhymes, taunts and parodies, secret languages, jump rope rhythms, autograph album inscriptions, even directions for making sand sculptures and paper frogs. Some entries might well be shared with children and compared with recent variations. Older boys and girls could be encouraged to use parts of the collection as the starting point in compiling their own regional collections of folklore. Great fun.

Available from August House, Inc., P.O. Box 3223, Little Rock, AR 72203, for \$19.95.

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