

# Reviews

## Educational Leadership and Changing Contexts in Families, Communities, and Schools

Lavern L. Cunningham and  
Brad Mitchell

Chicago

*The National Society for the Study of  
Education 1990*

—Reviewed by Arthur Steller, Superintendent,  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

The latest yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education is like a peanut butter sandwich with very little peanut butter—the slices of bread are there, but there isn't much to make them stick together. There are some fine individual essays and scholarly descriptions of changing contexts which influence education and the fact that educational leadership must change. It is up to the reader, however, to put it all together.

In his opening chapter, Lavern Cunningham provides a sound perspective on school administration in the traditional sense. "Principals and superintendents have been cited in the spate of national reports over and over again as both the Achilles heel of American education and the Adonis for improved performance of the nation's schools" (p. 2). He continues: "Educational leadership faces a number of serious challenges in a world that is changing rapidly, among them institutional decay, problems of equity, the impact of technology, and the need for collaborations among agencies serving children" (p. 12).

The boldest proposition also comes from Cunningham: "I propose that the focus of local government be fixed on well-being, acknowledging education as primary to the quality of life for Americans of all ages. Over the next generation or two, communities need to phase out local school districts, local school boards, and local school superintendents in favor of new jurisdictions and authorities through a carefully developed and statutorily approved reconstituting process centered on the notion of well-being" (p. 135).

Current school leaders may take umbrage with some of the critical comments tossed in their laps by the authors, particularly since this volume is short on specifics. Nevertheless, creative actions can emerge from the stimulation of the ideas included in this series.

Available from The National Society for the Study of Education, 5835 Kimbark Ave., Chicago, IL 60637.

## Restructuring Schools: The Next Generation of Educational Reform

Richard F. Elmore and Associates  
San Francisco

Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1990

—Reviewed by Ronald R. Musoleni, West  
Grove, Pennsylvania

*Restructuring Schools* addresses various approaches to the process of restructuring schools and new roles and responsibilities for educators and policymakers at the local and state levels. Part One discusses restructuring from varied perspectives and describes proposals to alter student-teacher relationships by changing traditional methods of instruction and learning. Part Two presents a look at restructuring in some pioneering school districts and the lessons that might be gleaned from the experiences of others. Issues confronting state and local policymakers are also discussed.

Rather than providing a prescription for restructuring, the authors present thought-provoking discussions to clarify those issues underlying the restructuring debate. Furthermore, the authors investigate the conceptual side of the debate by delving into the nature and effects of school restructuring.

*Restructuring Schools* would be useful to those readers interested in or already engaged in the process of restructuring.

Available from Jossey-Bass, Inc., 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 10536.

## Walking Trees: Teaching Teachers in the New York City Schools

Ralph Fletcher

Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Fleinemann Educational Books, 1991

—Reviewed by Brenda Miller Poiver, Assistant Professor, University of Maine, Orono

I did not expect to like *Walking Trees Teaching Teachers in the New York City Schools* when I sat down to read it. The brief introductory description by the author cemented my negative preconceptions. Ralph Fletcher promises an honest and deeply personal look at a year's work in the Teachers College writing staff development program. I've read too many accounts of similar experiences and development programs throughout the country. Often these narratives are self-indulgent and preachy, paeans to the ability of process writing methods to cure all ills in any school. I couldn't have been more wrong in my preconceptions about Fletcher's words. *Walking Trees* is a wonder.

It is the story of Fletcher's introduction to the New York City school system as a teacher trainer in a writing staff development program. There are many paths he follows in his yearlong journey—growing to understand children as writers, the disparity in the system, and the vast differences in quality and attitude of different teachers.

Throughout the text, food is a metaphor for strengths and weaknesses in the entire school system. The quality of the food becomes a metaphor for everything else we feed ourselves and students in our schools. Why is the food so bad in schools? Why is the atmosphere so inhumane in school cafeterias? These explicit questions are a kind of net holding up the more global, implicit questions like *Why are some of these classrooms so bad? Why are teachers given such a meager diet of respect? Why do we allow some students to feast in our culture on "rich truffles" of learning, while other students are starved for attention and good instruction from teachers?*

Another compelling theme in the book is that of death, decay, and re-birth. Fletcher weaves together beautifully the unfolding of the space shuttle tragedy, personal narratives of children, the crumbling buildings within the system, and the demise of his own marriage.

Some educators may criticize how harshly Fletcher views a number of the principals and teachers he deals with in *Walking Trees*. I believe he has done a superb job of cataloguing in specific ways the difference between a burned-out and a bad teacher. Taking out specific harsh references or avoiding negative insights would transform this text into just another whiny diatribe about how awful schools can be.

*Walking Trees* lacks the jargon which could make it fit easily into any educational camp, and it provides no easy answers to problems in schools. Its greatest contribution to our field may be that it helps us begin to ask more of the right kinds of difficult questions.

The image of "walking trees" in the title comes from the narrative of a child writing about trees in Florida that "walk" with their roots, moving one foot every one hundred years. The process of changing schools does seem excruciatingly slow at times. Fletcher helps us see the flaws and the daily joys in school systems so that perhaps someday reform may move faster than those walking trees.

Available from Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 361 Hanover St., Portsmouth, NH 03801-3959.

## Serious Players in the Primary Classroom

Selma Wassermann  
New York

Teachers College Press, 1990

—Reviewed by Kaine Johnson, Seattle, Washington

For the practice of holistic, child-centered elementary education in the 1990s, the only missing how-to piece has been "children learn to think by

thinking." Now it is here in Selma Wassermann's *Serious Players in the Primary Classroom*. The subtitle tells it all: *Empowering Children Through Active Learning Experiences*.

Of all the ways children learn, Wassermann states, "It is only play that allows active, experimental involvement: testing and trying, manipulating variables, gathering data in many different contexts, and interpreting data to develop meaningful concepts." She introduces a new style of instruction, "play-debrief-replay," and gives detailed suggestions for serious play in every curriculum area, always backed by meaningful concepts.

It is the "debrief" part that is unique: it is through debriefing that children learn to think. Wassermann is

aware that teachers are trained to want right answers only, but "life's most interesting and important questions rarely have single, correct answers, only better and less-good choices." *Serious Players* is full of examples of how to debrief play experiences. Evaluation of the process, wholly different from traditional evaluation and testing (which are supportive and empowering of neither children nor teachers), has its own chapter.

Play-debrief-replay doesn't give students the "right" concepts. "Debriefing . . . begs for replay, so the children can find out for themselves. That is empowering." So is this book.

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



Falmer Press • The International Education Publisher

### Practical Books on Design Technology in Education...

#### Recent Bestseller...

#### DESIGN TECHNOLOGY: Children's Engineering

Susan Dunn, Gladstone School District, Oregon,  
and Rob Larson, Oregon Museum of Science and Industry

"Required reading. This is a remarkable book, lavishly illustrated with color photographs and supplemented by Susan Dunn's delightfully clear graphic illustrations. The graphics are full of clever engineering ideas and would provide a wonderful resource for students."

—Logo Exchange

This book presents clear examples and techniques for holistic models of teaching and follows the design process from context to case studies.

1989 • 184 pages • Color Illustrations  
Paperback ISBN 1-85000-590-7 \$19.95

#### Forthcoming...

#### POP-UP PAPER ENGINEERING:

#### Cross-Curricular Activities in Design Technology, English and Art

Paul Johnson, Director of the National Book Art Project, UK

There is no area of paper technology more popular with children than pop-up engineering. This book, the first of its kind, introduces the language of pop-up forms in stage-by-stage practical workshops for teachers and pupils.

1991 • 184 pages • Color Illustrations  
Paperback ISBN 1-85000-909-0 \$20.00

To order call TOLL FREE 1-800-821-8312  
Falmer Press, c/o Taylor & Francis, 1900 Frost Road, Ste 101, Bristol, PA 19007

## The State and Educational Policy

Roger Dale  
Bristol, Pennsylvania  
Open University Press, 1989

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

*The State and Educational Policy* is based upon a review of contemporary school reform in the United Kingdom. Dale proposes that the "State" is not neutral, that it is committed to the preservation of a market economy, and that it must solve three problems: "support of the capital accumulation process, guaranteeing a context for its continued expansion; and the legitimation of the capitalist mode of production, including the State's own part in it." Accepting resistance, pluralism, and contradiction as part of the reform milieu, Dale writes that "we are faced with . . . a continuing series of rarely conclusive skirmishes on shifting terrain, between shifting alliances, in an overall context of a system attempting to carry out contradictory functions through means that may conflict with its objectives."

Thus, Dale argues that the State is primarily interested in ensuring that schools are not used to reject, oppose, or propose alternatives to the market economy. In sum, Dale provides proponents of school reform with an operative pluralistic definition of the State and its normative role in structuring and restructuring schools. But the essential question remains: For whom is the school built?

Available from Open University Press, 1900 Frost Rd., Suite 101, Bristol, PA 19907.

## Student Discipline Strategies: Research and Practice

Oliver C. Moles  
Albany, New York

State University of New York Press, 1990

—Reviewed by Thomas R. McDannel, *Converse College, Spartanburg, South Carolina*

This book evaluates current discipline and the emerging body of research on discipline strategies to answer the crucial question of what works. In so doing, Moles fills a vacuum in the voluminous literature on classroom and school discipline prac-

tices. The editor has organized the essays of leading researchers and practitioners—Duke, Furtwengler, Doyle, Emmer, and others—to help the serious student of school discipline stay current with what *seems* to work. The jury is still out.

Policymakers and professors will find much to ponder in this summary and analysis of research and experimentation. They will not find much support for punishment or suspension—or much for "one best method." They will find the research on Assertive Discipline, Teacher Effectiveness Training, Reality Therapy, Behavior Modification, and the like—fascinating but inconclusive. The final section on school/community strategies outlines a number of promising programs where school leaders have worked with police and other community agencies to design effective cooperative strategies to improve student behavior.

Available from State University of New York Press, State University Plaza, Albany, NY 12246, for \$17.95.

## School Effectiveness and School Improvement

B. Creemers, T. Peters, and D. Reynolds  
Amsterdam

Suets and Zeilinger, 1989

—Reviewed by Ronald R. Musoleno, *West Grove, Pennsylvania*

This publication is most useful for those interested in an international comparison of research and practice as they pertain to the effective schools movement. The editors have selected a series of papers that were presented at the Second International Congress for School Effectiveness (ICSE) held in Rotterdam in January 1989. The purpose of ICSE is to provide an international forum for the exchange of information and discussions of critical issues, to promote dialogue among researchers and practitioners, to foster networks, and to assist the work of national coordinating teams.

This volume underscores this purpose; it presents a look at what some countries are doing in response to the school effectiveness movement and how they are applying this research in practice at their respective schools. Contributing papers present research on a variety of topics including evaluation of school effectiveness, develop-



### Trainees will experience:

- Positive classroom management techniques
- Higher level thinking skills and implementation
- Strategies to incorporate social skills easily
- Simple structures which adapt to any curriculum or lesson
- Ways to keep all students actively involved throughout lessons, directions, activities
- Strategies for integrating curriculum
- Step-by-step techniques for structuring the cooperative classroom for success

or: Attend a Four Day Summer Institute in Oregon

### By the author of the books:

*Structuring the Classroom Successfully for Cooperative Team Learning and The First Four Weeks of Cooperative Learning, activities and materials*

**Teresa L. Cantlon**

### Schedule summer training through:

C&M Education Consultants  
PO Box 19044  
Portland, OR 97219  
(503) 588-0222 or (503) 694-5970

ment of performance indicators and educational policy, and developing models for effective schools. Those sections of the book dealing with reports on school effectiveness research and actual school improvement efforts are most valuable for both researchers and practitioners.

Available from Swets and Zeitlinger, Amsterdam.

### The Contexts of Teaching in Secondary Schools:

#### Teachers' Realities

Mihrey W. McLaughlin et al

New York

Teachers College Press, 1990

—Reviewed by Gretchen Schwartz, *Syllabus*, Oklahoma

This is an exciting time for educational research! An essential element in school reform, teaching practices, and policy analysis is being examined—the *human* element. In the introductory chapter McLaughlin and Talbert say that effective teaching, in addition to leadership and school goals, “also depends on another, more complicated set of factors, namely, how teachers think and feel about what they do.” The central idea of the “secondary school workplace as multiple embedded contexts” appears often in a study of how social and community values affect teachers, in a study on the impact of the structure of high school departments, and in an examination of professional development. All nine chapters are informative and thought-provoking, delving into the reality of secondary teaching in ways previous research has failed to do—because researchers failed to ask *teachers* anything. Teacher readers will be glad to find that someone “out there” acknowledges that “many experienced teachers find evaluation and supervision practices to be unhelpful” (p. 147).

Innovative perspectives in the last chapters are of special import to policymakers, from state legislators to building administrators. Realism leads to real hope. Other researchers should familiarize themselves with this book.

Available from Teachers College Press, 1234 Amsterdam Ave., New York, NY 10027. \$21.95 paper, \$42.95 cloth.



## OUR BEST ADVERTISING IS WORD OF MOUTH!

The National Staff Development Council is proud to be recommended by our finest resource: *Our members.*

“No other organization offers NSDC’s personalized services.”

— District Staff Development Specialist

“The *Journal of Staff Development* is the best magazine I get. It’s very easy to read - not too academic.” - *Principal*

“The networking is essential. The \$50 membership is worth every penny.” - *Central Office Consultant*

“NSDC’s Conferences are the best anywhere.”

— Superintendent

For a free NSDC three-month trial membership and copy of the *Journal of Staff Development*, mail in the coupon below today. See for yourself what makes NSDC so special...to so many.



**Your network for staff development**

National Staff Development Council  
P.O. Box 240  
Oxford, OH 45056

Respond by June 15, 1991

Please enroll me for a free NSDC three-month trial membership, and send me a free copy of the *Journal of Staff Development*.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

National Staff Development Council, P.O. Box 240, Oxford, Ohio 45056  
(800) 727-7288 or Fax (513) 523-0638

Copyright © 1991 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.