In this open themed issue, we review professional books that explore learning across a broad spectrum. The four reviews that follow ask questions about the influence of economics and technology on language use, the impact of low-income communities on learners, the necessity of exploring multimodalities with 21st century learners, and the effect of teacher learning on student learning.

In *Words at Work and Play: Three Decades in Family and Community Life*, Shirley Brice Heath shows how individuals’ work, language, play, and learning are influenced by financial and technological changes. She traces the lives of the working-class families who readers first met in *Ways with Words* (1983) as they reshaped their lives over a period of 30 years. Heath’s book highlights families who rearranged their work, language, play, and learning in response to economic pressures and technological growth.

In Jonathan Kozol’s latest book, *Fire in the Ashes: Twenty-five Years among the Poorest Children in America*, Kozol returns to the scenes of *Rachel and Her Children* and *Amazing Grace* to tell the stories of young men and women who have come of age in one of the most destitute communities in the United States. He shares the devastating journeys and unexpected victories of the children he portrayed as they grew into adulthood.

In *Working with Multimodality: Rethinking Literacy in a Digital Age*, Jennifer Rowsell focuses on eight modes and illustrates each through interviews with professionals from diverse backgrounds and disciplines. Sounds, images, and hypertexts comprise some of the multiple modes of meaning making we use in today’s digital world. Yet, within literacy education, we know relatively little about how to work with and produce modally complex texts.

In *Leading for Powerful Learning: A Guide for Instructional Leaders*, authors Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman, and Hensley offer a practical, research-based framework for thinking about instructional leadership along with the necessary resources and tools for improving teaching practices. This book combines theory with best practices to create a vision of how 21st century instructional leaders can improve literacy and education for all students.

These four books carry messages about students of all ages as well as their teachers, and they are important resources for supporting students’ academic lives and our understanding of the interrelated nature of language, communities, multiple modalities, and learning. Not only do these books support us in developing our professional knowledge base about significant topics, they also invite us to adopt new ways of knowing through which to view our learning and ourselves as educators. (PJ)
(Heath, 1983) was the beginning of the research that continues within *Ways with Words: Three Decades in Family and Community Life*. I was first introduced to Shirley Brice Heath through *Ways with Words*. At the time of its publication in 1983, this book and the research that it represented were groundbreaking. Dr. Heath taught courses in anthropology and linguistics at a state university, and many of her graduate students were teachers, business leaders, ministers, and mill workers.

As research partners, she and her students documented ethnographies of communication of 300 families in two different communities, Roadville and Trackton—both pseudonyms for actual towns located in the central areas of the Piedmont Carolinas. *Ways with Words* detailed how the children and townspeople in these two different communities learned to use oral and written language. Roadville, a white working-class community, and Trackton, a black working-class community, were both tied in different ways to the textile mills for generations leading up to Heath’s ethnographic research, which spanned almost a decade from 1969 to 1978. She lived, worked, and played with the families and their friends within these two communities as she sought to portray the face-to-face community networks from which each child learned “the ways of acting, believing, and valuing of those about him” (p. 6).

The 1970s were a particularly rich time for such an ethnographic study. A legislative mandate to desegregate schools in the 1960s caused a reshuffling of students and teachers. Desegregation also caused a general shift in social and work opportunities, making it necessary for teachers, businessmen, mill foremen, and those people in each of these communities to change their usual practices and ways of interacting with people. “Once desegregation began for schools and mills alike, white children went to schools with black teachers and classmates; black teachers faced black and white students; white foremen supervised black mill workers. For the first time, black and white worked side-by-side in the mills, and white foremen, mostly males, worried about ways to instruct black workers, male and female” (p. 2). Communication was a common concern as they worked to bridge language and cultural differences. For Heath, this opportunity to study language learning processes of the people in these communities and to provide a full description of their ways of living, eating, sleeping, worshipping, playing, and working was the perfect setting in which to examine “the effects of the preschool home and community environments on the learning of those language structures and uses which were needed in classrooms and job settings” (p. 4).

Having read both *Ways with Words* and *Words at Work and Play: Three Decades in Family and Community Life* (Heath, 2012), I was captivated by how significant the changes were across three decades for the families from these two communities. Heath has captured how individuals’ lives and their language use are shaped by the economic, technological, and social networks they are both a part of and those they come in contact with in our vast American society. Readers will enjoy the decades-long family portraits painted through the hardships and successes experienced by three original families from Roadville and three from Trackton. Readers follow the children and grandchildren of these ordinary working-class families as they grow, work, play, migrate, and are reshaped as a result of the double-dipped recessions of the 1980s and through the economic instabilities and technological developments of the first decade of the 21st century.

*Words at Work and Play* gives a unique historical and personal view of what happened to families as they experienced resettlement, family hardships (e.g., chronic illness, gang life, cocaine addiction, etc.), or splintered nuclear families. For others, relocation brought new economic and educational opportunities. We relive, again, the economic setbacks that followed the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the changes wrought by the harsh recession of late 2007.

Shirley Brice Heath, a leading social historian and ethnographer of family life, presents a...
captivating and scholarly narrative in *Words at Work and Play* that brings to life the stories of Zinnia Mae, Jerome and Lucia, Donna, and others who demonstrate how adaptability and the willingness to continue learning with energy, initiative, and innovation influence their lives and learning. I concur with the publisher’s marketing copy, which states: “Combining social history, language records, and a close examination of community life over many years, this outstanding study is a must-read for anyone interested in family life, language development, and social change.” (DD)

**Fire in the Ashes: Twenty-five Years among the Poorest Children in America**

Twenty-five years ago, Jonathan Kozol first introduced readers to children who lived in one of the most destitute communities in America through his books *Rachel and Her Children* (Kozol, 1988) and *Amazing Grace* (Kozol, 1995). Even today, he maintains contact with many of these children and their families and considers them some of his closest friends. In *Fire in the Ashes*, readers discover the children’s trials and triumphs as they grow into adulthood and explore the support provided by parents and community members.

While Kozol claims that he did not look for patterns of behavior in the families he came to know, he does draw parallels in Part One. For example, Kozol describes Eric, Vicky’s son, as a boy who found it “difficult to be transparent in his conversations and relationships with older people at the church who took an interest in him” (p. 17)—a quality Kozol suggests may have been self-protective so as not to worry his mother. Unfortunately, it was also a quality that shut out those who tried to help him when he was older. Similarly, Pietro’s son Christopher said very little and appeared to be distrustful. In his relationship with his father, Christopher “spoke to him in tones of thinly veiled contempt” (p. 54) because, Kozol notes, Christopher’s father could not give him material things. Both of these young men spent time in prison and eventually lost their lives through violence.

Kozol also includes stories of parents who overcame adversity by using their voices to help others. For example, Ariella Patterson organized anti-gun and anti-violence campaigns and produced a video with messages from other parents who lost their children to violence. Another parent, Alice Washington, attracted Kozol’s attention because of “her irreverent sense of humor and her absolute refusal to succumb to the passivity that was induced in many of the others who were living in the Martinique (welfare hotel)” (p. 109), thus inspiring others to overcome adverse situations.

In Part Two, “A Bright Shining Light,” Kozol tells stories of hope. He describes the children’s stories not just in terms of academic success but as “inward growth—in decency, in character” (p. 145). For example, he describes Leonardo’s story. Leonardo’s mother was always “lighting fires of excitement” (p. 165) to encourage his playfulness and curiosity when he was younger. With the help of Martha Overall, a former lawyer turned Episcopalian minister at St. Ann’s Church, Leonardo received a scholarship to a boarding school, and he quickly became a leader among his peers due to his outgoing personality. Kozol predicts that after attending college, Leonardo will have success in psychiatry because of “his warm, supportive personality and his relaxing manner, not to speak of his compassion and his easygoing sense of the comedic” (p. 169).

Pineapple, a bossy six-year-old when Kozol first met her, offers another story of hope. Kozol describes her “buoyant and affirming personality” (p. 173), and writes that even her complaints were conveyed in terms “peeviously amusing rather than self-pitiful” (p. 173). Her parents and relatives
collectively reinforced a sense of affirmation, creating an “island of emotional security and warm congeniality” (p. 179). With assistance from Martha Overall, Pineapple received scholarships to attend a middle school in New York City and high school in Rhode Island. Currently, she is attending college. Kozol notes that Pineapple now looks back on the years in the Bronx with a new perspective and a new assertiveness in her choice of words to describe the conditions of the schools that look like jails and where children do not have textbooks.

Jeremy, a mild-mannered twelve-year-old when Kozol met him, was often ridiculed by his peers and teachers. Consequently, he often skipped school, but he found solace in the home of a Puerto Rican poet who lived in the neighborhood and talked to him about books and history. Martha Overall again intervened and secured placement in one of the “small academies” in the South Bronx dedicated to raising test scores. When Martha was told that Jeremy was not a likely candidate for college, Kozol suggested that Jeremy attend a summer program at a boarding school in Massachusetts. The following year, Kozol intervened again and secured a place for him in Massachusetts where the headmaster recognized Jeremy’s appetite for learning. After graduation, he selected a college in New York.

Lastly, Kozol describes his relationship with Benjamin, his godson and the adopted son of Martha Overall. After unsuccessful attempts in public school and boarding schools, Benjamin started using drugs and was arrested. Martha encouraged him to enter Odyssey House, a residential program for addicted people. Recognizing his inner strength from Martha’s example, he is now helping others who are in the program and is back in school. What strikes Kozol is Benjamin’s “sense of warm protectiveness he brings to bear, not only in the work he does but in the lives of everyone who’s close to him” (p. 299).

In his conclusion, Kozol points out that in each success story, the child had an unusual advantage: someone intervened. Kozol believes that to truly educate children of a genuine democracy, we cannot leave it to “charity and chance and narrow selectivity” (p. 304). Instead, he suggests that “public schools themselves in neighborhoods of widespread destitution ought to have the rich resources, small classes, and well-prepared and well-rewarded teachers” (p. 304) so every child can enjoy “the feast of learning” (p. 304) rather than leaving matters to chance. (BG)
ILLUSTRATORS, WRITERS, FILMMAKERS, DANCERS, and architects to gain an emic perspective on the contemporary meaning-making process. Comparing and contrasting production stories across modes, Rowsell offers a converged multimodal framework that argues for a model of core processes that has important implications for literacy learning and teaching “because it suggests a need to think far more progressively about what literacy might mean in the future with digital and media convergence” (p. 2).

The book consists of nine chapters that are each framed by a different mode: film, sound, visual, interface, videogames, space, movement, word, and textile. The organization of the book, according to modes, isn’t meant to imply that these processes have clear boundaries. In fact, Rowsell explicitly cites how “tricky” it was to sequence the book in that producers often described using similar, overlapping modes with different emphases—reifying the idiosyncratic nature of meaning-making work. The overlaps and connections between chapters speak to the overall thesis of the book: that there are generalizable features and “core processes” of multimodal work that offer an alternative framework to older traditions of domain-specific practices.

Each chapter opens with a fascinating anecdote about the focal mode and then moves on to a brief overview of relevant theories and key themes. Within a few pages, the reader is sitting next to one of the producers, listening in as he or she talks with Rowsell about the processes and practices involved in creating a specific kind of “text.” Across all of the chapters, the producers talk about the “assemblage process” as a series of deliberate modal choices with the goal of communicating a message to a specific audience; this is just as true for website developer Lisa Murphy as it is for clothing designer Trish Ewanika. “Take-Away” sections at the end of each chapter speak directly to teachers and researchers by offering concrete suggestions on how to apply the insights offered by the professional producers to educational settings. These sections are critical to situating this interdisciplinary book within the field of education and, more specifically, to a literacy audience.

In the book’s conclusion, Rowsell synthesizes theoretical as well as pedagogical “lessons learned.” With a nod to multimodality, she proposes a spiral-shaped diagram to situate the nine focal modes with the aim of flattening the hierarchy of modes. In light of producer interviews, it is evident that “leveraging the power of less visible modes is a way of preparing students for life” (p. 148). Rowsell cautions readers, however, that this work involves more than inviting innovative modes of representation into the classroom; rather, she argues that overt instruction—where a practice is labeled, modeled, and taught—is critical when remaking literacy curriculum to meet the needs of the 21st century.

As teachers look for ways to position students as “designers, makers, and doers” (p. 153), ongoing conversations with professional producers across diverse modes are needed to ensure that, as a field, we’re not simply creating more “school-based” practices that bear little connection to multimodal meaning-making processes in everyday life. Working with Multimodality serves as a powerful first step in exploring a converged multimodal framework, and it is an important resource for teachers looking to expand their thinking about modal learning and textual production. (BB)
The importance of continued adult learning in schools is the driving force behind Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman, and Hensley’s text, *Leading for Powerful Learning: A Guide for Instructional Leaders*. The authors acknowledge educators as professionals who are capable of learning from and with each other. However, as the authors point out, “Teacher learning doesn’t just happen on its own. It takes leadership” (p. 4). This leadership role may be filled by educators in many positions, from master or lead teachers to principals to curriculum coaches or mentors. The overarching question that frames this book is: “How do leaders help teachers learn?” (p. 12). As such, the focus of this text is on the instructional leader who works to create the space for teacher learning to flourish and who supports teachers in their learning. This text provides the tools and structures necessary for instructional leaders to create a culture within their schools that encourages powerful learning—learning that takes place when “teachers, principals, and superintendents regularly engage in meaningful dialogue with colleagues about improving their practice” (p. 3).

While the primary audience for this text is the instructional leader, many of the structures described for adult learners can be put into place in classrooms to support student learning. Examples of structures that teachers could transfer into their classrooms include the “Learning with Texts” protocols *Final Word* and *Four As* (pp. 31–34). Both of these protocols encourage learners in the socializing stage and would give student learners the opportunity to learn from and about texts with their peers. Further, the structures described by the authors to create a community of adult learners, such as protocols to set group norms and create space for collaborative work, could be replicated in classrooms. The transfer of these structures from professional development sessions to classrooms could result in more purposeful, powerful learning experiences for both students and teachers.

The book is divided into seven chapters. In the first chapter, the authors set the purpose for the text by describing teachers as learners and the role of an instructional leader in the learning experiences of teachers. Breidenstein et al. draw on the constructive-development theory of learning as described by Kegan (1998) to demonstrate the different places teachers may be in their professional learning. Kegan’s theory categorizes teacher learning into three categories: instrumental, socializing learning, and self-authoring. The authors summarize research and related literature to support their argument that instructional leaders have the responsibility to understand the learning stages of the teachers with whom they work in order to best support teacher learning. Just as students have preferred learning styles, the authors argue, teachers also have preferred ways of learning. And while acknowledging these individual learning styles is important, the authors encourage the instructional leader to discover ways to support group learning, because, as they say, “Unless a school can learn, the knowledge, insight, and good judgment of each teacher will remain in that teacher’s classroom” (p. 8). With this in mind, the next three chapters of the book are structured in a way that honors the idea that teachers learn in different ways.

The next section of the book contains three chapters on the three phases of teacher learning—instrumental, socializing, and self-authoring. These chapters are dedicated to providing information for the instructional leader to support and facilitate teacher learning in each of the three phases. The authors define and describe in context the different ways in which teachers learn and argue that teachers are on a “learning continuum” stretching from instrumental to self-authoring (p. 11). Each chapter takes a look at learning structures that instructional leaders may choose to put into their professional development plans to support teachers at various stages on the learning continuum. The structures are named, defined, and placed in context within schools across the United States, and the authors intersperse research that supports the implementation of these structures.

The final three chapters focus on facilitating, designing, and leading teacher learning, with the goal of moving teacher learners “along the
learning continuum” from instrumental learning to self-authoring (p. 11). Model questions are provided to support the instructional leader in the planning of professional development; suggested strategies like protocols are thoroughly defined, and the procedures to conduct the protocols are clearly outlined in figures. The authors provide a discussion of potential pitfalls, such as not creating space for all teachers’ voices to be heard or not being reflective throughout the learning process, in order to help the instructional leader proactively anticipate areas of concern that may arise. Throughout the text, the authors provide real-life scenarios from a variety of educational settings and quotes from instructional leaders who put into practice the ideas presented in the text. The book concludes with several appendices of protocol procedures as well as resources that provide references and websites of organizations that work to support teacher learning in each of the three phases.

A comprehensive resource for any instructional leader, this book challenges the traditional notion of top-down professional development that is provided to teachers. Leading for Powerful Learning provides instructional leaders the tools necessary to guide ongoing professional development that acknowledges where teachers are in their learning and honors teachers as experts who can contribute to their own professional growth and that of their peers. (AD)

References

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