Learning is built into our jobs as teachers; it is one of our key responsibilities. By being knowledgeable about current issues in the field, we are better able to support our students as readers, writers, thinkers, and learners. We are better able to help them negotiate the complexities of their lives now and in the future. The texts reviewed in this column help us broaden and deepen our understanding about language, race, equality, and literacies in schools. These are all issues that we need to understand deeply in order to make wise decisions about equitable classrooms.

Bauer and Gort (2012) help us better understand biliteracy and the rich literacy potentials of children who have two languages and cultures. Arguing that “peace and good fortune” prevail when we provide all children “the opportunity to flourish,” Boutte (2015) provides specific suggestions about how teachers can accomplish that. Schultz (2008) explores what happened when he and his inner-city fifth-grade students took on the project of convincing the powers-that-be that they needed to leave their dangerously dilapidated Chicago school for a safer and more modern building. In their texts about writing, Bourque (2016) argues for close reading as fundamental to close writing, and both as critical to helping students identify as writers and honor their identities as writers, while Cruz (2015) focuses on challenges faced by teachers of writers and suggests ways that teachers can provide rich educational possibilities for every student. Dudley-Marling (2015) counters recent national reports and encourages all of us to honor meaning-based practices, which support the growth of students as readers and writers, address diversity, and create “respectful, caring, inclusive classrooms.” Dudley-Marling notes that by focusing on meaning making (as opposed to isolated skills), we ensure that all students benefit from a “pedagogy of affluence” (p. 83) and learn very well to read the world as well as the word (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Six books, out of hundreds, provide us as teachers with critically important ideas to try out, think about, learn from. These six paths help us take responsibility for creating the kind of equitable classrooms our students deserve and for becoming the teachers we want to be. (DS and PJ).

Early Biliteracy Development: Exploring Young Learners’ Use of Their Linguistic Resources
by Eurydice Bouchereau

Bauer and Gort believe that there is “much promise in children who grow up with two languages and cultures and become biliterate” (p. 1). They view emergent bilingual students from a multilingual perspective that is “based on a holistic view of the bilingual learner, including validation of students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds as resources for learning” (p. 5).

In their powerful book, Bauer and Gort review the scarce research on the literacy development
of young children (preschool through third grade) who live with two or more languages. Such scarcity of research is problematic given the growing number of culturally and linguistically diverse students in US schools. The book is organized into three parts, each of which begins with a vignette and includes some questions for the reader to consider when reading. Part I, “Emergence of Biliteracy: The Preschool Years,” introduces three studies that focus on biliteracy development for young learners in the contexts of school and home. In Chapter 2, for example, Bauer and Mkhize consider the role of parents and caregivers in supporting young bilinguals’ language development. They describe a study of one family’s interactions with a young English/German bilingual student. The authors conclude that, at home, adults have the power to scaffold language learning for children and that a supportive and nurturing home context supports the development of two languages.

Part II, “Biliteracy Development in Early Elementary School,” focuses on studies of emergent bilingual students in kindergarten—3rd grade in different instructional contexts. For example, in Chapter 7, “Traveling the Biliteracy Highway: Framing Biliteracy from Students’ Writings,” Fránquiz describes the possibilities of biliteracy for students in rural communities along the Mexico/US borders who do not have access to bilingual instruction. She presents an ethnographic study in which students engaged in a project-based literacy unit based on the concept of quilting. Students participating in this project were able to use their linguistic resources to code-switch during the project—both during their conversations and in their writing. Fránquiz refers to these students as spontaneous bilingual learners because they made use of both languages despite not receiving formal instruction in their home language.

Part III, “Reflections and Future Directions,” offers a celebration of bilingualism, as well as a discussion of the restrictive US education policies that continue to limit the development of emergent bilinguals’ literacy potential. Bauer and Gort also provide future directions for the study of emergent bilinguals and state that many questions still remain about the literacy and language experiences of emergent bilinguals.

One of the distinct features of this book is the focus on biliteracy development from the perspective of children learning different languages. The editors present studies of children learning different languages (German, Chinese, Spanish, and others), all of which reached similar conclusions: When children are in supportive contexts (home, school, and community), they have the potential to develop multiple languages. (SR)

**Educating African American Students: And How Are the Children?**

In this beautifully written text, Gloria Boutte urges us to transform classrooms based on the belief that peace and good fortune will only prevail if the children—all children—flourish. Anchored in this African Masai cultural reference, Boutte’s work is without a doubt one of the most important texts written in years for teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher educators. Through it, Boutte expertly supports readers in building understandings about why particular attention must be paid to better educating African American students—and why #BlackLivesMatter as a societal movement must matter first in schools—and offers a rich range of classroom examples from teachers who use decolonizing and culturally relevant frameworks to develop transformative pedagogies.

Through this text, Boutte creates safe textual spaces for readers to learn how to identify inequitable systems that often operate under the radar of those not victimized by them. She guides readers through the difficult but important process of recognizing how the dehumanization of Black children can be perpetuated through schooling. Boutte explains that to make transformation possible, educators must reflect on the roles they
can play in perpetuating or dismantling oppressive practices. Readers are taken into classrooms to learn about transformative practices, and classroom photos and text boxes with reflective questions support instructional planning that can be easily extrapolated across disciplines and grade levels.

Chapters 1 and 2 build background for the rest of the book with discussions of the current societal and educational landscape, individual and institutional discrimination, essential terms, and a synopsis of strategies discussed in the book. Chapter 3 focuses on critical and diaspora literacies, building on the concept of literacy as a social practice that reflects one’s language, race, culture, and ethnicity. Boutte emphasizes critical literacies as essential to helping students become “more fully human” and provides teaching practices that support students in “becom[ing] ever more critically aware” (p. 59). Emphasis also centers on the selection of texts that move the lived experiences of Black children from margins to the curricular center; the use of diaspora literacies so that students learn about and (re)claim African cultural, social, and linguistic traditions; and ideas for teaching critically about topics such as enslavement, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Civil Rights.

Chapter 4 focuses on African American Language, its history as a rule-governed system, and descriptions of techniques such as contrastive analysis, which is used to support students’ understandings about language(s). Chapter 5 shares specific culturally relevant classroom practices designed to promote a) academic achievement countering models of student failure; b) cultural competence illuminating beauty and possibility in the cultural identities and communities of Black students; and c) critical consciousness. Chapter 6 provides a look at how teachers can work with and learn from Black families and communities. Chapter 7 draws the elements of the book together, charging us to revise the teaching of African American students.

Through this book, readers will better understand why and how we must take a stand for the humanity of Black students and support teachers’ tenacity and love to make it so. Through this elegant blend of wisdom, theory that matters, history, caveats, and the personal and practical, readers will feel cared for, supported, and challenged to make a difference in the lives of Black children. Teachers will come away with deeper insights about transforming their classrooms. Overall, the book is a lovingly crafted and much needed text for every educator. (LJ & SL)

**Spectacular Things Happen along the Way: Lessons from an Urban Classroom (Teaching for Social Justice series)**


Spectacular Things Happen along the Way (2008) is the story of one teacher’s journey with his fifth-grade class as they embraced a year of project-based learning they co-designed and co-constructed. Schultz’s students lived in Chicago’s Cabrini-Green public housing project, and he was determined to find a way to make learning relevant and engaging for them. He presents a narrative account in a way that allows readers to not only understand what he was thinking and doing throughout this process, but also to view the journey through his students’ eyes. The chapters are focused on the natural process that occurred following Schultz’s initial decision to reject “teaching to the test” trends. Instead, he takes up a teaching for social justice stance within his classroom. The chapters cover such topics as embracing students’ interests, identifying a problem to be solved, sharing authority, seeking a solution, process as product, and justice-oriented teaching.

Schultz details the process he and his students went through as they tried to get a new school building because theirs was so dilapidated. He
shifted her thinking from the use of effective instructional strategies in the workshops to the students’ responses to those approaches. She began to focus on teaching students how “to look in order to see” (p. 182). In her book, she takes readers inside the writing workshops of teachers in Augusta, Maine, to understand how, through her collaboration with them, the teachers began to rethink and refocus their writing instruction.

Through Bourque’s coaching, teachers came to understand how providing their students with more opportunities for “cultivating a relationship between a writer and his or her writing through mindful and purposeful rereading, reflecting, and revising” (p. x) would enable them to develop their own writing identities.

Close Writing: Developing Purposeful Writers in Grades 2–6 is divided into three parts. Part I, “Guiding Principles,” explores the concepts of close writing and close reading. In Chapter 1, Bourque describes how young writers do not consistently reread their writing and “often look at their writing through a single lens that reflects the limits of their expertise as writers” (p. 9). Until they learn to look in order to see, they will not develop as independent writers (p. 7). In Chapter 2, Bourque argues, “Close reading is at the heart of close writing strategies” (p. 29). She provides her readers with an in-depth look at the concept of close reading by referencing those writers whom she calls “the modern-day giants in the world of literacy” (p. 14). She explains how teachers must help students learn to transfer their skills as close readers of others’ texts into close reading/rereading of their own written texts in order to develop new understandings of their writing (p. 13).

Part II, “Close Writing Lessons,” consists of nine chapters, each with considerations for English language learners. In each chapter, Bourque includes methods teachers can incorporate into their existing writing workshops to help students better develop their identities as writers. These methods include helping students listen to the sound of their writing as well as looking at

Acknowledges being sure of his beliefs about education, but not always being sure about how to deal with the day-to-day realities of this kind of project. Students felt empowered by this project. They realized that their voices matter, and they became excited about using them to make a difference. Schultz frames his classroom experience with his reflective thoughts about his practice, which he examines through literature on the subject. The emphasis Schultz places on embracing the process and letting the students lead are strengths of this book. His work is an example of what is possible and may encourage teachers to try something like this with their students, even if they aren’t sure yet how it will all work out. He also brings in the work of many scholars—including Bill Ayers, Lisa Delpit, John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Thomas Hopkins—to support and challenge his thinking throughout his journey.

Although Schultz’s book provides a close look into what this kind of nontraditional, justice-oriented instruction might look like for both teachers and students, it is important to remember that this book is based on Schultz’s first and only year of teaching public school; his work with these kids was his doctoral dissertation. His experience is, therefore, unique in ways that are not necessarily repeatable. In spite of this, the book provides important lessons about how to tackle obstacles within schools and embrace student-led learning. Overall, the story is inspiring, the narrative is honest and familiar, the students’ voices are invaluable, and the discussion of current issues faced by teachers through the discussion of literature on these subjects make this an enjoyable, inspiring, and informative read on teaching for social justice. (BD)
mentor texts for possible techniques and traits to experiment with in their own writing. In Chapter 6, Bourque suggests ways for teachers to help students increase both their volume of writing and their stamina for writing. Hoping to help students understand that writing is not a one-dimensional process, she emphasizes in Chapters 7 and 8 the “re” parts of writing—rereading, reflecting, revisiting, and revisioning. Also included are chapters that offer ideas to help students become more aware of editing with their readers in mind. In Chapter 10, Bourque addresses assessment and feedback that will support children as they discover who they are as writers. She reminds teachers of this by stating, “Assessment for close writing is focused around providing information that will continuously guide the teaching and learning in our classrooms” (p. 231).

Part III, “Close Writing with Authors,” includes interviews with authors about their writing processes as well as activities to help students engage with the authors’ responses. Bourque concludes the book with an extensive reference/resource guide. Additionally, there is a companion website with reproducibles, templates, and classroom writing lessons.

Bourque has written a book that is valuable not only for her intended audience of teachers in grades 2–6, but also for teachers in other grades. Her concerns about the problems she encountered with young students as writers in her classroom experiences as a literacy coach can be generalized to students in all grades. Students who do not know how to be close writers, no matter what their ages, struggle to see writing as a process rather than simply a product. By sharing her story, Bourque helps teachers of all students realize her vision that “. . . we can foster deeper relationships between the writer and the writing through close reading, purposeful reflecting, and mindful revising” (p. xii). This book is an important resource for any teacher who wants to help students of all ages grow and develop as writers. (JG)

The Unstoppable Writing Teacher: Real Strategies for the Real Classroom by M. Colleen Cruz, Heinemann, 2015, 148 pp., ISBN 978-0-325-06248-8

In the forward to this book, Lucy Calkins notes, “Writing is struggle. If we want our students to become strong writers, then they have to become brave ones. We have to model that bravery in how we teach writing by naming the monsters that challenge us and facing them” (p. xi). It is common knowledge that writing and teaching writing are hard work. Every writer, experienced or novice, has been humbled by the blank page. In her latest book, Cruz addresses the common challenges or “monsters” that face teachers in their efforts to teach writing effectively by using a workshop approach. Cruz provides a network of strategies for dealing with all students, including those both gifted and challenged.

The twelve stand-alone chapters are useful and solid resources for writing workshop. Teachers can choose a chapter that addresses their immediate needs. In fact, each chapter addresses a common yet different challenge and has subheadings that offer a journey through it; some examples include, I teach grammar but my kids don’t learn it; I find some student writing repetitive and boring; I can’t seem to get my students to stay writing unless I’m sitting beside them; I’m not sure how to work with students new to English; I don’t know what to teach this student—he’s a much better writer than I am. The collection of strategies is impressive and offers teachers the option to choose one or more particular strategies to try.

Chapter 4 addresses the topic, “I’m not sure how to work with students new to English.” Cruz is candid about her experiences as a classroom teacher. She faced students whose first language was not English along with her lack of knowledge and ability to address the needs of these students.
She argues that teachers must be aware of the needs of second language learners, and encourages them to seek out resources that describe best practices that can make the classroom experience for both teachers and students richer and more rewarding. Cruz makes the point that in order to teach any student, the teacher must first know the individual and his/her country and culture. She clearly understands that teaching is about building relationships, so she suggests ways to engage English language learners: visuals, gestures, color coding, translation software, picture dictionaries, and predictable language. At the end of the chapter, Cruz offers teachers a list of additional resources from leaders in the field in an effort to help teachers continue their reading and learning.

This book will offer teachers a wealth of strategies, resources, and ideas to add to their writing workshop classroom. It is easy to read and navigate, and it addresses many of the common dilemmas all teachers face as it offers practical solutions that are classroom ready. (VAO)

A Manifesto in Defense of “Teacher Educators Like Me”: Preparing the Nation’s Teachers to Teach Reading

Are America’s public schools failing? Is that the fault of university teacher education programs that are not preparing teachers to teach reading? The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ, 2013, 2014) thinks so. They cite statistics from their most recent survey of teacher education programs to support these claims. Curt Dudley-Marling argues that schools are not failing and that while teacher education programs vary in their effectiveness, they are not responsible for educational inequities. As noted by Marilyn Cochrane-Smith’s foreword, Dudley-Marling addresses with clarity and patience the major assumptions and critiques in the NCTQ reports and creates reasonable doubt about the validity and reliability of their research. He draws upon “substantial theory and research to support (his) claims” (p. 10). Indeed, readers of this book will find key arguments and data to counter claims that American public schools are failing and that our newest teachers do not know how to teach reading.

Dudley-Marling makes three major points: 1) he questions the intentions of the NCTQ panel, 2) he critiques their research, and 3) he counters the criticisms leveled against a meaning-based approach to the teaching of reading. Dudley-Marling states that the mission of the NCTQ panel since its formation in 2000 has been to advocate for reforms in policies at federal, state, and local levels to increase the number of effective teachers in our schools. To determine effectiveness, NCTQ assesses whether or not teacher education programs teach methods supported by their interpretation of the findings of the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000). Dudley-Marling summarizes the many published criticisms of the NRP: small samples sizes, a narrow and unevenly applied definition of “scientifically based” research, and its bias toward behaviorist models of reading.

Dudley-Marling also details the weaknesses of the NCTQ’s research methodology. He critiques both their use of course syllabi and assigned texts to measure course content and their sampling of only 72 of the nearly 1200 teacher preparation programs in the US. He also criticizes their failure to align the ranked programs to available student outcome data on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments. Dudley-Marling notes that there is “no relationship between the NCTQ assessment of how well early reading is addressed in teacher preparation programs in individual states and how well students learn to read in that state” (p. 25).

Dudley-Marling also argues against the NCTQ’s criticism of meaning-based reading instruction and demonstrates that it is not based in empirical science. Drawing upon Haberman (1991) who coined the term “pedagogy of poverty,” and
Berliner’s research (2013), he argues that children from low SES households are often exposed to the very curriculum valued by the NRP. He describes how these methods fail to promote the kind of thinking to which students in more affluent financial situations are consistently exposed. To support his argument, he noted that there was a correlation coefficient of -0.67, showing that as NAEP scores decreased, the poverty level increased.

The concluding arguments describe what teacher educators like Dudley-Marling want in place of the current NCTQ evaluation, and he compares his goals to the reform agenda articulated on the NCTQ website. He explains how diversity—and educational practices that honor that diversity—are essential to creating “respectful, caring, inclusive classrooms” (p. 80) and to ensuring that all students benefit from a “pedagogy of affluence” (p. 83) that results in learning very well to read the world as well as the word (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Dudley-Marling’s text reminds us of Goldstein’s (2014) historical analysis of teaching. Goldstein demonstrated how the media and policy makers focus on a single group of people or an issue (such as poorly trained school educators) as “emblems” of a large, complex social problem. This creates a “moral panic.” Dudley-Marling provides the data to counter this most recent NCTQ attack on education and helps us focus instead on the complex intersections of issues faced by teachers and teacher educators. (AB &DD)

References

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