

Thursday, January 31, 2008

Book Review

Book Title: Side-By-Side Spanish & English Grammar

Author: Farrell, Edith R. and Farrell, C. Fredrick

ISBN: 0071419322 Format: Hardcover/ Soft cover/ eBook Pub. Date: 2003, Second Edition Publisher: McGraw-Hill

Pages: 152 Cost: \$8.95 (List)

Available: Amazon at as low as \$ (new) \$4.98 (used) - \$4.98 at eBay & #8482; \$3.92 The Books' Topics: This book describes the following: Short history of English

Short history of Spanish

Summary of the Parts of Speech

Exploration of the Use of Each Part of Speech in English and Spanish

Exercises in question Pronouns and Adjectives

Exercises with "Por vs. Para" and "Ser vs. Estar" The book is systematic, and compares and contrasts the use of each

Part of Speech for both languages. The central themes of this book are: Learning Spanish or English Grammar is easier if you build upon the similarities of the target language with your native language.

In addition, the authors focus upon Grammar essentials, i.e., those usually covered in high school Spanish, or during the first year of college Spanish

Quick access to information for use as a study reference

Quick review for study

Providing alternative ways of explaining both English and Spanish Keywords: Native Language Grammar

Target Language Grammar

Parts of Speech

Explanations in "Standard English" and "Standard Spanish"

English Language Timeline

Spanish Language Timeline

Germanic, French, Latin Roots

Old English, Modern English

Quick Check Charts Main Idea: Grammar consists of a complex set of rules and conventions. These rules and conventions take dedicated study.

But, you may not want to bother because the study of grammar is boring.

Besides, it is possible for native speakers of a language to internalize the structure of the language's grammar without knowing how to describe the rules in academic terms.

In this way, building a repertoire of usable grammar skills is similar to riding a bicycle. In riding the bicycle, you do not need to know complicated scientific terms for what you do when you steer, pedal, balance and apply the brakes.

However, if you were to want to build a better bicycle, you would need to know these things (engineering, physics, anatomy, kinesiology, etc.).

But, teachers need to build complex lessons that facilitate student learning. This is when a reference book like Side-By-Side Spanish & English Grammar becomes valuable.

In addition, Side-By-Side Spanish & English Grammar is valuable if you are studying or teaching Spanish.

The strategy of Side-By-Side Spanish & English Grammar is to build new learning by connecting that learning to what you already know.

With the native English speaker learning Spanish, the bottleneck to the learning process may be that the language learner doesn't know much English grammar. This is where Side-By-Side Spanish & English Grammar comes in. This reference outlines the grammar for both English and Spanish. Issues Addressed by the Book: Grammar has changed a bit since most "Baby Boomers" last studied it.

Gone are the strict labeling of parts of speech or the strategy of simply memorizing a list of prepositions.

In vogue now is a structural and functional interpretation of grammar, i.e., what is the way that the words and phrases are used instead of arbitrary labeling; learning rules that are "made to be broken." The Book's Shortcomings: The book cannot offer redress to the fact that grammar is boring and almost entirely "Left Brain" learning material.

Aside from the histories of English and Spanish (about four pages), grammar topics are those that only a language trivia buff could love.

However, the authors' precise treatment of a boring topic (about 140 pages) lessens the pain of learning two sets of grammar (English and Spanish).

The book might also have addressed Punctuation because punctuation is so intimately associated with grammar.

The fact that language differences between English and Spanish are "findable" based upon only a marginal knowledge

of the Parts of Speech is a weakness that is turned into a strength for this book. Comments: Teachers need a book like this if they are going to study another language or if they are going to teach their own native language.

And, teachers need a book like this to brush up on new insights into their own language, even if they are not English or Spanish Teachers or Language Arts specialists.

Even seasoned veteran English teachers could find information and explanations that they once knew, but long forgot (or is that "forgot long ago"?) in this book.

And for the rest of us, we might discover things about our native language that we didn't know...even though we correctly use those language principles each day. Summary: Side-By-Side Spanish & English Grammar is useful, but probably not a "must have" reference for many teachers.

The book rates high because the book is so useful. Writing the book so that it was fun, amusing, exciting, attention-riveting might have been counter productive. Teachers and students of a foreign language want to find information quickly for lesson planning, lesson content and study purposes.

This book is a great resource if you need lesson plan background material, examples of more grammar points than you will ever need in ordinary writing and grammar trivia questions.

Purchase this book as a reference. Use it. Build grammar lesson plans from it. Use the book for its "talking points" approach to language instruction.

Keep the book handy with other reference resources that you use daily such as your dictionary and thesaurus. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 2

Original - 2

Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.2

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 04:00

Monday, December 31, 2007

Book Review

Book Title: How to Learn any Language

Author: Farber, Barry ISBN: 1-56731-543-7 Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 1991 Publisher: NY: Barnes and Noble Books
Pages: 172 Cost: \$ (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$7.00 new, 2002 edition) \$2.94 (used) - \$1.24 at eBay #8482;
(as an eBook) Subtitle: Quickly, easily and On your Own! The Books' Topics: This book describes the following: How the author came to be fluent in 18 languages

The system that the author uses to learn languages The author also describes the relationships and quirks of many languages in the world, and provides an abbreviated grammar primer. The central themes of this book are: The traditional high school and college approaches to learning language are ineffective

A systematic, multi-pronged approach to learning languages is effective

Practicing a target language in every spare moment brings language mastery Keywords: Language Learning

Multiple-Track Attack

Hidden Moments for Review and Reinforcement

Magic Memory Aids Main Idea: The author describes a system that pieces together a textbook, grammar book, phrase book, dictionary, cassette program, flashcards and a newspaper to develop a sustained focus for learning a language.

The author points out that the study of a language needs consistency, and resolve; plus the ingenuity to fill every spare moment with study.

The author downplays the need to learn (boring) grammar before diving into the study of a language, and he provides a short summary of all the grammar that a language learner needs to get well along on the path to mastering a foreign language. Quotes: "Common sense also tells us that we can't enjoy communicating in a foreign language until we learn it. This means years of brain-benumbing conjugations, declensions, idioms, exceptions, subjunctives, and irregular verbs. And here common sense is wrong, completely wrong. When it comes to learning foreign languages, we can start with the dessert and then use its sweetness to inspire us to back up and devour the main course." (p. - 5)

"Up to now, grammar has been used by our language educators to anesthetize us against progress. If it's grammar versus fun, we're going to minimize grammar and maximize fun. We're going to find more pleasant ways to absorb grammar." (p. - 5)

"All of us 'spill' enough minutes every day to learn a whole new language a year! Just as the Dutch steal land from the sea, you will learn to steal language-learning time, even from a life that seems completely filled or overflowing. What do you do, for example, while you're waiting for an elevator, standing in line at the bank, waiting for the person you're calling to answer the phone, holding the line, getting gas, waiting to be ushered from the waiting room into somebody's office, waiting for your date to arrive, waiting for anything at any time." (p. - 6)

"Expertise is a narcotic. As knowledge grows, it throws off pleasures to its possessor, much like an interest-bearing account throws off money." (p. - 22)

Myths:

"I'll put on my language cassettes while I work around the house and learn the language as easily as I learn lyrics to popular songs." (p. - 38)

"Since I'm not in school anymore, time isn't important. I'll take my time, skip a day, skip two days; the language will still be there when I get back to it." (p. - 38)

"I'm never going to pose as a native speaker of the language, and I'd never be able to pull it off if I tried so why bother to develop the right accent?" (p. - 39)

"Americans have grown up believing learning languages is hard. It is not hard! It merely seems hard because language instruction in American schools and colleges has until lately been so exasperatingly dull and unrewarding." (p. - 42)

"I've long entertained the fantasy of putting the old orthodox grammarians on trial for war crimes, the specific charge being assassination of the fun that flows from gaining command of another language. Their defense will be predictably be 'Bah humbug. You can't immerse, converse, rehearse, or even play around with a foreign language without a good foundation in grammar!'" (p. - 43)

"Grammar is an edifice that you build on your property. But it doesn't have to be done all at once." (p. - 44)

"It may be strange to some (and wildly objectionable to others) to recommend do-it-yourself language cassettes starring you in the language you are trying to learn. Orthodox language teachers are likely to consider this something akin to doing your own eye surgery." (p. - 57)

"It's better to know the word; its meaning, its spelling, its use in sentences; even if you have to listen to it in your unskilled accent, then not to know the word at all." (p. - 58)

"The language student should reach for a fresh stack of flash cards before he leaves home in the morning as instinctively as a policeman reaches for his badge. The flash card, more than any other tool, can help the student take advantage of the day's 'hidden moments,' the secret weapon upon which the promise and premise of this method is

based."(p. - 58)

"We have some magic, all right, tricks and tactics that literally shovel the language into your head, as opposed to your high-school Spanish class that tea spooned in in or didn't bother getting it in at all. The system, however, won't work unless you do. There's going to be pain, but you will have something—plenty—to show for it…The promise here is not gain without pain. It's the most gain for the least pain."(p. - 60)

"Attempting to master a language with a grammar book alone is too boring;" with a phrase book alone, too superficial; with cassettes alone, too fruitless (except with Pimsleur!); and with dictionary and newspaper alone, impossible. The multiple track attack makes your work pay off(p. - 61 & 62)

"Tradition-bound teachers would have problems with that kind of 'ice plunge,' a naked leap into a foreign language newspaper after only five lessons of grammar with nothing for help but a dictionary, which in many cases can't help because you won't know the various disguises (changing forms) of many of the words."(p. - 68)

"America is a nation of people who make straight A's in intermediate French and then get to Paris and realize they don't speak intermediate French!"(p. - 68)

"Are you presently armed with the right cassette course?…Unless your cassette was mislabeled and carries lessons in a language other than the one you'd like to learn, it's a good learning aid. It may not be the best. It may be far behind the best, but so what? It will offer you words and phrases in your target language with native accuracy in pronunciation."(p. - 71)

"Harnessing your hidden moments, those otherwise meaningless scraps of time you'd never normally think of putting to any practical use, and using them for language study&8212;even if it's no more than fifteen, ten, or five seconds at a time—can turn you into a triumphant tortoise."(p. - 74)

"Hidden moments will heal your deficiencies soon enough, but first let's talk about the unhidden moments", the study time that you've arranged to commit to your endeavor…Successful self-teaching is our objective. If you can take a whole hour every day and devote it to your studies, you're in an excellent position to make satisfying, even dramatic, progress. If you can devote a half hour a day, you're still poised for success…If you can't commit a regular block of time, if the best you can do is an hour here, a half hour there, and maybe a three hour block of time over the weekend, that's satisfactory, provided you keep it up and maintain momentum. Gardens unattended [sic] go to weed. Apples bitten into and abandoned turn brown. Likewise, your collection of language data—words, phrases, rules, and idioms—will dissolve into a worthless mass if not kept up.…Apportion as much time as you reasonably can and as regularly as you can, and then enjoy the magic as the hidden moments kick in.(p. - 75)

"Arrange your life so you will never be caught without something to study in your target language."(p. - 77)

"When you encounter a native speaker of your target language, and when you start a conversation in that language, three things are certain. YOU will be stuck for words you need but don't know. He will use words you don't understand. And you will make mistakes. Get in the habit of exploiting these moments to the hilt."(p. - 103)

"Native English speakers have more to gain from studying other languages than everybody else. Honor, love, cooperation, respect, advantage—they all shower on people in inverse proportion to their need to learn a language."(p. - 110)

"Two, four, six, eight years of high-school and college study in a foreign language, and still our American graduates can't tell whether the man on the radio speaking the language they 'learned' is declaring war or recommending a restaurant."(p. - 114)Issues Addressed by the Book:

This book address the problems with language learning that are encountered in high school and college classes, i.e., the approach is slow, boring and doesn't work.

Instead, the author proposes a system of self study that uses many tools and learning aids, especially the ones that the person already has, to develop a review and reinforcement system.

The most important issue is whether readers are sufficiently motivated to set up a system for learning a language, and then going through the expense of purchasing all the learning tools that the author recommends.The Book's Shortcomings:The author clearly knows what it takes to study and master a language. But, he doesn't say what a language teacher needs to do to help a classroom full of recalcitrant students.

Of course, the book is written for people who don't have the time or money to take a college or community education class. But, the book could have addressed how a language teacher might approach teaching language skills in the framework of our public school system.

In addition, the book could have addressed issues concerning how we should talk to children who speak a foreign language, rather than just how to talk to adults. This is important as many teacher now find children that speak languages other than English in their classrooms.

The last missing element in this book is a focus upon knowing the culture of the target language.

The author's focus upon the vocabulary and mechanics of language learning keeps us too busy to study the culture that adds richness, depth and meaning to that language. Comments:The "all out assault" on the learning of a language that the author recommends is probably beyond the motivation of most people.

Still, the concept of a multiple-track attack on the study of any subject is something that

And, if teachers promoted the multiple-track attack to all students so that students could pick their preferred learning styles, many students would learn a lot more.

Although this edition of the book is outdated in terms of the technology, the basic principles of language learning remain

valid and reliable.

The only things that might have changed are: The Internet provides all types of language resources

The computer can be used to record language pronunciation practice

CDs and MP3 players have replaced cassette programs

Digital Voice Recorders work better than tape recorders

But, despite technological advances, personal commitment, personal daily practice, and personal motivation remain the prime factors in learning a language. Summary: The author demonstrates a passion for learning languages that inspires learners of any content area. The author's philosophy of 1.) using every method and modality of learning, 2.) finding connections between what is already known, 3.) using every spare moment for learning and 4.) measuring progress provide a model for all types of learning.

Teachers that show their students how to make use of the personal learning styles for learning practice will provide their students with a life-long learning skill.

Barry Farber also lets his passion for languages show, and his passion is contagious. This is also the type of contagion that teachers need to infect their students with. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 2

Original - 2

Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.2

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 04:00

Friday, November 30, 2007

Book Review

Say it in Six
Author: Hoff, Ron
ISBN: 0-7607-3529-8
Format: Hardcover
Pub. Date: 1996
Publisher: : Barnes & Noble
Books
Pages: 153
Cost: \$ (List)
Available: Amazon ™ at as low as \$10.36 (new) \$1.50 (used) - \$1.95 at eBay ™
Subtitle: How to Say Exactly what you Mean in Six Minutes or less
Say it in Six reminds us that brief speech is great speech. This is something that teachers need to remember when they deliver a lecture "to students" instead of facilitating learning "for students."
The Books' Topics: We talk too much

The "Burning Issue:" Linchpin of the six-minute speech

Cut to the chase: Slimming down to six means "Dump the junk"

The "Six-Minute Structure"

The style of the Six-Minute Speaker

Learning from the great Six-Minute Speakers of the world

Cutting costs and solving problems in Six-Minutes
The central themes of this book are: Short communications, well thought out, tightly crafted convey meaning better than longer messages

Structured thinking leads to eliminating distracting information from your message

A focus on the audience, not yourself, leads to better communication

People fully pay attention only when the communication is about them
Keywords: Burning Issue

Clothesline Structure

High Wire Structure

Six-Minute Structure: A Do-it-Yourself Kit

Toughen up your Message

The Six-Minute Speaking Style

The Six-Minute "Palm Map:" (Single, Mind-Map Style Note Card for the Entire Speech)
Main Idea: Almost everyone talks too much after minimal preparation. Better preparation allows us to shorten the time that it takes to deliver the message. A shorter message increases the amount of information that our audience receives.

Centering on the audience (their needs, their issues), counts more than lots of words and elaborate descriptions when we want to communicate clearly. (Don't we want to communicate clearly?) And, centering on the audience eliminates our self-centered, nervousness-generating focus upon ourselves.
Quotes: "Six minutes disciplines the mind and tightens the message." (p. - 6)

"Meetings & hellip; are known mainly for their rambling arguments and eternal monologues. A well-made, six-minute speech would stand out like an exclamation point in a sea of commas." (p. - 11)

"The burning issue of this book: U.S. business wastes \$40 billion on mismanaged meetings every year. We look for all kinds of ways to cut costs and overlook the most obvious one. We talk too much." (p. - 17)

"Woodrow Wilson was asked how long it took him to prepare a 10-minute speech. 'Two weeks,' he said. 'How long to prepare a one-hour speech?' 'One week.' 'How long to prepare a two-hour speech?' 'I'm ready now.'" (p. - 54)

"Memorizing is the pits. It instills the fear of forgetting. A memorized speech becomes a 'performance'-- a 'set piece' which can be given to anybody. Audiences hate that. Every audience thinks of itself as different, unique, deserving of special treatment. You should memorize the structure. You can even memorize certain words and phrases that you know will work for you. But memorizing the whole thing, word for word, imprisons your thoughts rather than setting them free." (p. - 61)

"Jurors remember only 60 percent of what they are told. Why? Answer: The case isn't about them. No matter how hard they try, people have trouble paying attention to presentations that aren't about them. Moral: Talk to the self-interest of your audience at all times." (p. - 74)

"Here in Washington, members of the House of Representatives enjoy a privilege that is denied to all of us and envied by most of us.

'When a member makes a speech on the house [sic] floor, stenographers take down every word--type it up--then it's printed in the daily Congressional Record.

'That is, printed after the member has gone over it, corrected it himself, changed his errors, resolved its bad grammar, and taken out everything that--for some political reason--he wishes he had not said.

'Receives of the Record get a version of what was said--corrected, purified, pasturized--and usually fairly dull and often pumped up by 25 to 30 percent.'" (p. - 87)

"Nervousness occurs when you are deeply concerned about yourself. Nervousness is very selfish. You're afraid you'll be boring. You're just plain afraid & hellip; mostly for yourself. How about being deeply concerned about the audience's problems that you have been asked to address? How about being deeply fearful for their welfare?

The sooner you transfer the deep concern you feel for yourself to the deep concern you should feel for your audience, the sooner you'll be over your nervousness. "(p. - 92)
Issues Addressed by the Book: The book address the problem that

meetings, speeches, presentations and other oral communications are too long because 1.) they are not well thought out and planned, 2.) they lack a focused strategy and a narrow focus and 3.) they will not be remembered or acted upon because the audience was lost, bored, or not paying attention. This waste of time, talent, productivity and opportunity costs billions in productivity and outcome payoffs each year.

The author is revolted by this state of affairs, and suggests that a "Say it in Six Revolution" is needed to halt the waste. The Book's Shortcomings: This book doesn't have any shortcomings because it focuses upon speech making. However, the book could also address what speakers have to do when they need to fill larger time slots with other kinds of communication, such as lectures, training sessions and presentations.

The author could also have focused a bit more on the skills required to color and spin the message with language that the audience understands, identifies with and uses. Comments: Teachers should take the Say it in Six message to heart. Not only should teachers clip, crop and curtail the amount of words that they spew to students, but teachers should demonstrate the Say it in Six technique to students, and assist students in improving their communication skills.

The other side of the Say it in Six strategy is to get students to talk. Teachers need to get students to lay ideas out on the table so that those ideas can be examined, not as a coroner examines a cadaver during autopsy; but as a botanist examines newly discovered species of flora deep in the rainforest. Student hinging must be nurtured, cultivated, celebrated and honored.

Therefore, it is OK if students ramble before they can deliver incisive speeches. Consider this to be like baby fat. Cute, cuddly, but later giving way to sleek, buff rock-solid muscle. Summary: Here are the steps for the Say it in Six Structure

Get to the point. State the "Burning Issue." No burning issue, no need to talk

Brief overview: Short background summary

How the background leads to the main idea…

How the idea will pay off, create a benefit

What we need to do now. A "call to Action" required from the listener Just remember to apply and synthesize these steps with analysis and evaluation.

We want to avoid converting a learning aid structure into a maze or prison that boxes us in. Remember what havoc we wrought on students ability to write when we taught a generation how to write by "formula?" The "formula" created lots of lockstep student output, devoid of interest, personality, spark, or charm or thought. Use the structure to multiply communication choices, not stifle and limit thinking. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 3

Original - 3

Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.5

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 04:00

Wednesday, October 31, 2007

Book Review

Home Schooling Author: Clement, Andrea D. ISBN: 1-57886-128-4 Format: Softcover Pub. Date: 2004 Publisher: Scarecrow Education Pages: 87 Cost: \$17.95 Available: Amazon ™ at \$17.95 + \$2.00 sourcing fee, but as low as \$1.01 (new) through other vendors - not found on eBay ™

Subtitle: A Research-Based How-To Manual Ever wonder "how the other half lives?"

I have always thought it strange that families would "home school" their children because…It is so much work

They might not have teacher training

It dilutes the parental role because of the "dual relationship"

They pay school taxes so, they are paying twice

It is such a huge commitment

Their children loose out on social and communication skills from being around children from all religious, ethnic and social backgrounds

Sheltered religious thought isn't possible with the content of the media (TV, Radio and the Internet) anyway Of course, if the school district has expelled their incorrigible child and they can't afford to send the child to a private school, the parents may have to teach the child themselves. Of course, this kind of child is the worst possible student, a student that even teachers require special training and a controlled environment to manage.

The Books' Topics: Theories of Learning Academic Ability

Choosing a Curriculum

Motivation and Discipline

Testing and Grading The central themes of this book are: Parents need to consider a lot of things before undertaking the education of their children by themselves

Parents must decide if their children will benefit from instruction at home, decide if they can meet the standards set by the state that they reside in, decide if they are up to the task

Parents must plan, design, build or purchase a curriculum, and the higher the grade level of their child, the more academic demands the curriculum places on the parent-teacher

Keywords: Home Schooling

Research-Based

Theories of Learning

Choosing Curriculum

Testing and Grading Main Idea: The main idea of this book is that applying research-based models to home schooling is a novel undertaking, and that most parents fail to comprehend the implications and nuances of the task before they set out on the path to teaching their children.

The author believes that parents who know the "research-based" background of education can make better choices. Quotes:

"Academic ability in this context refers to intelligence and the amount of prior learning. Both have an impact on what materials and teaching methods can be used and how rapidly material can be covered…The intelligence of the child and the intelligence of the homeschooling parent can affect what type of curriculum materials and teaching methods can be used effectively, as well as what type of time commitment must be made for homeschooling."(p. - x)

"One of the most thoroughly covered topics within this book is how to choose curriculum materials, or what will be taught, or whether materials will be used at all…An example of a type decision that must be made before committing to a particular type of instructional material would be how deeply or how rapidly topics will be covered. Other considerations include how much hands-on teaching time the parent will take with the child; whether and how testing will be done; and the results of diagnoses of intelligence, prior learning, temperament, and learning styles discussed earlier."(p. - x & xi)

"One of the most compelling questions asked by educators is how learning occurs. Just as anything we do not completely understand, there are a multitude of theories. As my students often hear, 'If I knew which theory was correct, that would be the only one I would need to teach.'"(p. - 1)

"It is apparent that there are many diverse views of how people learn…The most useful application of this information is probably to pick and choose concepts or strategies that explain or assist in a child's learning."(p. - 15)

"The ability of students and their homeschooling parents is important to discuss because this will influence several aspects of homeschooling. The student's level of intelligence will determine the difficulty of materials to be used, the speed with which material is covered, and the parental expectations, at least to some extent. The student's prior learning will have an impact on what the student is ready to learn, or in other words, where the parent should begin."(p. - 17)

"If IQ changes over time to just the type of environment in which the child is reared, do interventions specifically

targeting IQ increases work? Programs like Head Start have shown increases in IQ scores if the intervention is continued for participating children; however, if it is not continued, these improvements seem to wash out in a couple of years. The implications of these findings reinforces what is believed by many homeschooling parents: the child will benefit most by long-lasting, enriching, challenging, caring instruction."(p. - 22)

"A parent with high intelligence will be able to understand the work that the child is doing, will be able to help the child when he or she finds the material difficult, and will probably be more confident about the teaching process. A parent with lower intelligence will have more difficulty and will probably be less confident. This does not mean that only geniuses should homeschool. It means that understanding where potential weaknesses lie, and accommodating for those ahead of time, may make the homeschooling experience more pleasant."(p. - 23)

"A highly intelligent child will be able to cover material quickly, may need little help, and will most likely proceed to eventually take more advanced subjects (calculus, chemistry). A child who has lower intelligence, on the other hand, will cover material more slowly and may need more help, possibly much more help."(p. - 23)

"Students should have schoolwork that is appropriately difficult but doable. The ability to tailor the level of the work to the student is one of the primary benefits of homeschooling. The goal should not be to ensure that the child is working at exactly the same level as other children at the same grade or age, but to have him or her challenged appropriately. If material is too far beyond his or her ability, he or she will not learn it and will be frustrated. If it is too easy, he or she will learn far less than is possible and will get bored. A challenge seems to be best."(p. - 24)

"Sometimes, for a child that has extreme deficits or extreme areas of giftedness, extra help may be needed. That could come in the form of consultation with someone that has worked with similar children, finding Web sites with helpful ideas, or studying to become acquainted with possible interventions."(p. - 24)

"Some personalities are better suited for homeschooling than others."(p. - 25)

"Much as been said about learning styles in recent years, and much of it conflicts…After becoming familiar with learning styles, the difficulty arises when one tries to decide how to use the information. Should the student be allowed or encouraged to use the style he or she is most comfortable with? Should the emphasis be placed on developing those that he or she is less comfortable with? Should he or she have to use all of them? There is not enough research evidence to make a determination."(p. - 28 & 29)

"Although there is little definitive research on the effects of accommodating learning styles, it seems to make intuitive sense to provide schoolwork that uses multiple senses. This way, whichever strengths children have will probably be tapped. They will also be presented with material that requires the use of their weaker areas and may strengthen those. Some lessons can be presented more visually, some more auditorially, and a few hands-on. The problem with too many hands-on activities is that they tend to be more time-consuming."(p. - 31)

"There are many formats that can be used when homeschooling, from un-schooling, which is very unstructured and looks very little like traditional school, to a traditional format that is almost indistinguishable from public school other than the location. Much of the decision about what format to use for homeschooling has to do with how much actual time a parent plans to spend in direct teaching activities. This could fall anywhere along a continuum from direct instruction (the most time in direct teaching activities) to self-study (the least amount of time in direct teaching activities.)"(p. - 34)

"There is a great deal of freedom in determining content when homeschooling. In most states, there is a vast amount of flexibility until high school. At that point, there are probably some required subjects, but the order in which they are taught and how they are taught is still up to the parent's discretion."(p. - 37)

"How much material should be covered? Even classroom teachers struggle with this question. If fairly traditional textbooks are used, it is typical to cover approximately one book per year in most subjects. Publishers have usually determined how much material can be reasonably covered in a school year. However, most of the powers that be that oversee homeschooling do not check the amount of material covered. Time is the main consideration for public school systems and most homeschooling umbrella organizations, which some states allow to oversee homeschoolers. A typical time requirement is four hours a day for 180 days, or the equivalent."(p. - 38)

"Often public school teachers were not able to complete textbooks during the course of a school year. This means the children were not taught the material at the end of the book. This can become a problem if the next year's textbook assumes that the material was covered. This is one of the great advantages of homeschooling."(p. - 39)

"An added benefit of homeschooling is the opportunity to cover material very rapidly (quantity). One of the most common complaints heard from parents of bright students in public schools is that their children are bored and could cover far more material…Some will double up and do two years of work in one…the student may have covered lots of material, but he or she may not understand it well and may forget it quickly. Also, if the child returns to public or private school, he or she may be bored because of the necessity of covering the material again."(p. - 39 & 40)

"Many curriculum materials come completely prepared with lesson plans (what the child should cover each day, how many days per week), quizzes, tests, worksheets and possibly other materials. Possibly the most complete…are computerized programs. The student reads; complete activities, quizzes, and tests; and receives grades, all on the computer. At the other end of the spectrum would be the un-schoolers who use no curriculum at all."(p. - 40)

"Cost is a factor in the decision to homeschool had to determine what curriculum to use. If one has been accustomed to paying private school tuition, purchasing homeschooling materials will probably come as a relief, but if a child has been in public school, they may seem more like a weighty investment. After purchasing curriculum for the last three years, our average per-student expenditure has been \$200 - \$300. Of course, one could spend less or far more."(p. - 41)

"If behavioral principles are followed consistently, and the reinforcers and punishers are strong enough, children will be compliant. Consistency is the most difficult but most effective part of the equation."(p. - 57)

"Briefer is better. For example, if looking at a child with the evil eye will stop his or her behavior, studying will be interrupted much less than if a loud lecture about why the behavior is wrong is given."(p. - 59)

"Punishment should consistently follow broken rules, praise should consistently follow obeyed rules, and rules should stay the same. If children know what to expect, they will be less likely to misbehave."(p. - 60)

"The first assumption made in this chapter is that homeschooling parents want to verify and document their child's learning. If not, this chapter can be skipped. This is not said tongue in cheek, because there are families who practice un-schooling who don't wish to grade or formally evaluate academic learning because they do not differentiate academic learning from day-to-day learning."(p. - 63)

"The first choice is whether to test or not to test. There are some homeschooling families as well as teachers in public and private schools and colleges who prefer not to test. There are other ways to assess learning. This can be done through informal oral questioning, assigning activities that have students use the skills that they have been studying…However, if a parent is not opposed to testing, it can be used to efficiently learn how well material is being covered, how effective teaching materials are, and how much effort the kids are putting forth."(p. - 64)

"Noise may or may not be distracting to a child. In public school there is often a great deal of noise, and school goes on. Therefore, a silent environment is neither required nor expected for homeschooling. However, some students may be distracted by noises, particularly other siblings and televisions. Some accommodations may have to be made to reduce the noise or move the student farther from the source of the noise if it hinders schoolwork."(p. - 72)

"If children are out of the way of household distractions, they may also be out of the way of adult supervision. There needs to be a way to ensure that students stay on task, do not cheat, and do not interfere with one another as they do their schoolwork. Sometimes it is worth having them weather a few distractions in order to keep an eye on them."(p. -)

"The basic questions that should be answered before homeschooling are: Do we want a traditional or nontraditional curriculum?

Who will be the primary teacher, and how do that person's personality characteristics mesh with the student's/students'?

Do we want to teach for mastery, quantity of material, or somewhere in between?

What format will we use in our teaching (remember, it doesn't have to be the same for all subjects nor for the entire school year)?

What are our beliefs about testing/ evaluation?

What types of rules will we have, and how will they be reinforced?

What would be most motivating to our child/ children?

How will we set up the physical environment for homeschooling?

Will we follow a strict schedule or be more relaxed in meeting the time requirements for homeschooling?"(p. - 77 & 78)Issues Addressed by the Book: This book considers the theories behind the main issues of education, i.e., intelligence, learning, motivation, curriculum content, testing, grading and scheduling.

The book does not address the need for teacher preparation (in this case the parent's attitude, skills and abilities), and assumes that parents are in a position to make informed choices about all aspects of homeschooling for their children. Support for this assumption is not provided by case studies, action research, experimental research, or even anecdotal records.

The author also fails to question the decision to homeschool in the first place. Instead of listing the reasons that parents might consider homeschooling an option, instead of questioning whether the decision is reasonable, valid or wise; the author avoids this controversy. The Book's Shortcomings: The author summarizes research in only a general way. Of course this is about the level that most non-educator parents care to understand. However, the structure provides lots of theories, and little definitive strategy for making use of these divergent approaches. In other words, there are a lot of paradigms about curriculum, learning, motivation, intelligence, personality types, etc. So what?

The other shortcoming is a lack of focus upon learning outcomes. The most important thing about education is the observable and measurable achievement of each student.

Another shortcoming, appalling really, is the author's recommendation that parents can "multi-task," that is do the laundry, baby sit for younger students, cook dinner, watch TV, etc. while also teaching. I would like to be present when a teacher who is "called on the carpet" for doing other stuff instead of teaching tries to justify the "research" that supports this multi-tasking strategy in their classroom.

Teaching is more than a full time job. Home Schooling Parents who don't focus on instruction for six to eight hours a day are shortchanging their children. Of course this is difficult. That's the reason that children belong in a real school…and the reason that teachers must be "super-dedicated."

The author also fails to examine all the reasons that parents would embark on a home-schooling course of action, and separate these into rational and irrational categories. In addition, the author fails to stress the pitfalls and dangers of home schooling. The author makes it seem that cursory theoretical knowledge about a variety of theorists will get the parent through the "high seas, twisted currents and raging torrents" that encompass any project of the scope and magnitude of teaching one or more students for an entire year.

Imagine being the teacher of all subjects to multiple students at the same time. Sounds like the "one room schoolhouse of yesteryear."Comments: This book is like a college survey course minus the suggestions and recommendations.

Parents that read this book may receive an overview, but they don't know what they are in for if they undertake the full-time education of their children.

This book fails to make recommendations, instead leaving hard choices up to parents who choose the homeschooling route.

What might be more useful to parents would be arguments against taking on the obligation and commitment of homeschooling. Then, strategies needed to contend with the uphill challenge of actually pulling off a successful learning process for a year, or a student's K-12 career could be explored.

A survey of these theorists and their positions might prove helpful in a college philosophies of education class or such, but in the real world of "let's teach children the foundation for a lifetime of learning and employment, theories for homeschooling seem to come up short.

Application and action seem to be needed.

Parents cannot be confused and districted, or worse, come to believe that they are expert educators because they read a summary of some theories.

The ability to teach in the specialized content areas is also troubling. Algebra, calculus, plain and solid geometry, trigonometry, biology, chemistry, physics, history, geography, government, health and a foreign language (to name a few); mean that the parent has to learn the subject matter and prepare the lessons.

It is going to take a pretty smart parent to become conversant enough with these core content area subjects in order to do an adequate job.

In addition, special skills are required if students have special needs. Summary: The author states that this is a survey of research, however, the focus is on theories rather than action research.

Because the summaries are about folks who posited theories, rather than research based upon experimental groups that show results, the book is of little use to teachers.

As a rule, once teachers leave the ivy coated bricks of college, they have little use for theorists and their pontifications.

Teachers need what the experimental folks call "operationalization." That is, take the theory and break it down into doable, repeatable steps, and create a method to track progress so that if those steps falter, that corrective action can be taken early enough to preclude failure. The lack of "accountability" for parents would seem like a major concern, and it is unimaginable that schools could be run the way that this book suggests that homeschools are run. From a teachers point of view, "Incredible…incredulous…unbelievable.

Rating (Four Point scale):

Useful - 2

Applicable - 2

Relevant - 2

Innovative - 1

Original - 1

Interesting - 1

Overall Rating - 1.5

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 04:00

Sunday, September 30, 2007

Book Review

Teach with your Strengths: Authors: Liesveld, Rosanne and Miller, Jo Ann with Robinson, Jennifer ISBN: 1-59562-006-0 Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 2005 Publisher: : Gallup Press Pages: 203 Cost: \$24.95 (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$16.47 (new) \$9.42 (used) - \$9.99 at eBay(TM) Subtitle: How Great Teachers Inspire their Students The Books' Topics: Myths of Teaching Ability

Profiles of Innate Strengths

Flexibility and Unorthodox Behaviors of Great Teachers

Putting your Talents to Work

Managing and Working Around your Weaknesses The central themes of this book are: Talents (and weaknesses) are innate, and it is more productive to focus upon maximizing strengths than in minimizing weaknesses

Research methods for assessing strengths and talents are only useful if we study people with strengths and talents

Characteristics of greatness tend to cross job categories, making great people in all fields more similar to talented people in other fields than they are to mediocre people in the same field

Keywords: Strengths

Talents

Innate Abilities

Weaknesses

Myths about Great Teachers

Strength Finder Research Main Idea: Talents and skills seem to be innate, and it is more effective to focus upon developing these than to remediate weaknesses

Great teachers break the stereotypes about teaching because they are flexible and because they do what is necessary to teach their students.

Great teachers are unconventional, and are often not recognized for their abilities because they do the right thing at the right time. They don't necessarily do the things prescribed by common wisdom…the things prescribed by lowest-common-denominator of insight and talent that controls the job site. Quotes: "All great teachers are alike in a key way--they use their natural talents to the utmost, whether they are aware of it or not. What's more, great teachers don't waste time on their weaknesses if those weaknesses don't interfere with their teaching, although they do manage weaknesses if they must. When good teachers understand their talents, then build on those talents to create strengths, they become even better with students." (p. - 11)

"Fixing your weaknesses simply doesn't work; at best, if you work really hard with great devotion, you can become mediocre in those areas. In the meantime, because attempts to fix weaknesses distract attention and effort from what you naturally do well, you squander the opportunity to be great." (p. - 12)

"The first thing about great teachers is that they are in the best way, unorthodox. Great teachers' methods and intuitions are different. They don't operate like other teachers, and they don't believe everything that they are told. They work by instinct more than they even know, having worked out the strategies and approaches that succeed for them in reaching different students." (p. - 15)

"Great teachers know that a lot of what they've learned about teachings is tremendously useful, but some of it isn't, and they can tell the difference. The distinction is important. Operating from poor assumptions about education and students' behavior can undermine learning, poison spirits, and encourage students to tune out, sometimes permanently. In fact, interviews with educators have uncovered two essential feelings common to great teachers: One is love--love of students, learning and teaching. The other, which is no surprise, is exasperation with educational nonsense--conventional wisdom about teaching that is, in fact, misinformation." (p. - 16 & 17)

"Students are not prisoners or employees. Teachers with little talent for the job assume that they're working with a captive audience that must follow orders, but they're wrong…Students are essentially volunteers, and great teachers know that students must be emotionally engaged to learn effectively." (p. - 17 & 18)

"Young people that are not engaged won't work hard, which is why they are labeled as lazy." (p. - 18)

"Great teachers know that it's harder to reach some students than others. But they know, instinctively, that it's possible to engage almost any young person." (p. - 18)

"Great teachers use their students' needs, interests, and curiosities and turn them toward the curricula--'captivating them, not entertaining them,' " (p. - 19)

"Teaching demands talents for teaching--natural abilities that require cultivation and hard work to master. Assuming that anyone can teach breeds mediocrity, just as surely as thinking that anyone can be a doctor, architect, or police officer would foster unremarkable performance in those professions." (p. - 20)

"The not-so-good teachers spend their careers trying to do something at which they won't ever excel, that never gets easier, and that is increasingly less rewarding. And the exceptional teachers are often forced to compromise what they know is right to fit in with the pack. What's more, the outstanding teachers rarely get the recognition they deserve, and

they are pressured to assume models that aren't meant for them--models that lead to mediocrity." (p. - 20)

"Thinking that teaching requires no more innate ability than driving a car or making toast leads to mediocre educational standards." (p. - 20)

"Experience doesn't translate into exceptional job performance in teaching, or in any other field." (p. - 21)

"Meta-analysis, the mathematical and statistical study of the combined results of several studies, has uncovered the five-year fade-out effect. That is, someone who has been teaching for six years has all the benefits of experience, as they relate to job performance, that a 30-year teaching veteran possesses…It's the people with the personality traits for the job that keep getting better, year after year. Some teachers have the right personality traits--and some don't, no matter how long they've been in the classroom. That's why some veterans of education are so helpful to young teachers and students and some aren't." (p. - 21)

"Unfortunately, many teachers never realize that experience and talent are two different things. The fact is, young people don't respond to seniority or post-graduate degrees. They respond to teachers who have passion for their work. And people that don't have talent for teaching soon lose whatever passion they had." (p. - 22)

"The measures of teacher quality that are used by most public school system to screen candidates and determine compensation--certification, experience, and education level--have been well researched, but there is little definitive empirical evidence that these characteristics, defined in general terms, are associate with higher student achievement." (p. - 22)

"So educator experience has less influence on students than simple good teaching. The masters of science degree that half of all teacher have earned are less important to students than they are to the people that hold them." (p. - 23)

"Many great teachers find the image of the hardened disciplinarian disturbing, if not distressing. The get-tough approach suggests that students lie in wait, like half-starved pumas, for a moment of pedagogical weakness, then leap out and ravage any hope of learning--and teachers had better keep beating the kids back into the tall weeds or lose authority forever." (p. - 23)

"Punishment kills learning, and punishment eventually corrodes teachers.…Young people are thirsty for a caring adult. If you exhibit that you care about your students, they'll come to you. You'll have to peel them off you like Velcro." (p. - 24)

"Great teachers don't set high expectations. This might some as a surprise. Rather, great teacher set the right expectations for each student. Talented teachers have an innate sense of what those expectations should be." (p. - 25)

"The problem with high expectations is that they can be mistaken for impossible standards, even by educators, and especially by students. Rather than inspiring student to greatness and encouraging them to achieve, those impossible expectations doom students to failure." (p. - 26)

"Low expectations are just as damaging. In some cases, low expectations are thought to boost self-esteem because they provide successes. But after the first couple of successes, even young people recognize hollow victories when they see them. Low expectations suggest, however subtly, that students aren't capable of doing better." (p. - 26)

"That's why I hate 'teaching to the test,' says one teacher. It doesn't give kids any incentive to gain more than minimal competencies." (p. - 26)

"Teachers have been burned before. Sometimes they find themselves just finishing the (mandated) implementation of one 'brilliant' method when the next one comes along. Veteran educators have seen such curricula and methods come and go, some lingering, some dismissed as soon as they arrive." (p. - 29)

"The reason that great teaches think that 'magic method' is nonsense is because they know that every student is different and learns differently. Fortunately, human brains are similar enough that education doesn't have to be reinvented for each child, but no single method can accommodate the difference in the aggregate and yet speak to the differences in every individual." (p. - 29 & 30)

"Great teachers respect and admire students for the work that they do. They became teachers for the young people but stay for the learners. Even the best teaches, however, know that no one can like every student all the time." (p. - 31)

"One of the telltale signs of a great teacher is his or her inclinations at these times [conflict between theory and best practice -- Classroom Toolkit note added -- not in the original] to do, for the right reasons, what conventional wisdom says is wrong." (p. - 33)

"A great teacher has the ability to establish basic standards and develop boundaries that make it possible to deal with many students in a learning environment while adapting to the needs of those students. The inconsistency of great teachers is a product of flexibility." (p. - 34)

"On average, teachers spend \$443 of their own money each year on classroom materials--\$470 in large schools. Putting a dollar value on what is obviously emotional engagement may seem crass, but it illustrate an important point: Teachers care enough about the quality of their students' education to invest, in some cases, half a paycheck a year in materials." (p. - 34 & 35)

"The best methods of measuring student achievement, however, are less clear. Should society use national, statewide, or local standardized tests? Non-standardized tests written by individual teachers, boards of education, outside experts? Essay tests, no tests, criterion-referenced tests from kindergarten to 12th grade? The No Child Left Behind Act settled the question of whether testing would occur, and states now have in place some form of standards and testing for grades 3-8." (p. - 39 & 40)

"People think that totally dissimilar job roles are, well, totally dissimilar. But the truth is that there is a deep similarity

among high performers in every job category. An incredibly effective teacher has more in common with an incredibly effective aeronautics engineer than with an ineffective teacher. " (p. - 45)

"Conventional wisdom says that studying the worst performers will show us what not to do, and by doing the opposite, we'll figure out what we ought to do. Low performers will teach us what make high performers so successful. Nonsense. Studying low performers mostly teaches you about low performers. The truth is that studying the best is much more revealing and productive than studying the worst." (p. - 46)

"Most people have been taught that they can do anything that they set their minds to. This is particularly true in American society, where one of the predominant myths is that people can be if they just work hard enough." (p. - 47 & 48)

"The idea that people should work very hard to do things they aren't naturally good at for the sake of being well-rounded is a mistake. Everyone has a unique set of talents that are tremendously powerful and the potential basis for strengths. When you're busily trying to fix as lesser talent--a weakness--you're ignoring your far more effective talents, perhaps even ignoring some fully developed strengths. " (p. - 53)

"Ultimately, however, fixing weaknesses is impossible. Weaknesses are your brain's rough roads and overgrown paths, and trying to make them useful usually isn't worth the effort, especially when an eight-lane superhighway is a few neurons away. Working on weaknesses means that you keep doing, with dogged and pained determination, what you don't--and can't--do well. " (p. - 53)

"In a way, your weaknesses are like your greatest talents: They're innate and you can't get rid of them. The best thing to do is manage them or work around them. " (p. - 54)Issues Addressed by the Book:Improving teaching is the focus of this book. And, our students deserve nothing less. However, the road to improving education is fraught with the mine fields of mediocre teachers, and the common wisdom of choosing, training and rewarding teachers does not work.The Book's Shortcomings:This book strikes too close to home for many in the teaching profession, and therefore, will not gain enough traction to reform the inertial and gridlock that the status quo holds on the educational environment.

The book also makes no recommendation about how to rid education of the marginal performers that are trapped in the system, or, now to attract top talent with recognition and more money when certification, advanced degrees and experience prove not to be the crucial variables that make teachers great.Comments:This is a code on the inside cover of this book that allows you to access an online test to narrow down a picture of your strengths.

Unfortunately, the library book that I used for this review didn't have the number, so I am not able to review the test.

There were a number of strength patterns listed in the book, but without access to the test, you have to guess at your personal attributes for greatness.

Buy the book if you are interested.Summary: Teachers must read the first section of this book because the author's real-world data dispels many of the myths of what makes great teachers.

If you want to see past the "tunnel vision" that your professional course of study left you with, read Section One of this book. Rating (Four Point scale):Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 3

Original - 3

Interesting - 4

Overall Rating - 3.7

Friday, August 31, 2007

Book Review

Book Title: Soar with your Strengths

Author: Clifton, Donald O. and Nelson, Paul ISBN: 0-385-30414-5

Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 1992 Publisher: Delacorte Pages: 193 Cost: \$19.00 (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$10.20 (new) \$0.55 (used)- \$2.75 at eBay(TM) The Books' Topics: Our national obsession with weakness

Focus on strengths, manage weaknesses

Do more of what you do well

Stop doing what you don't do well

Strengths and weaknesses are only relative

Ways to recognize good work The central themes of this book are: We waste time and people's lives by focusing on remediating weaknesses instead of building upon strengths.

We also seem obsessed with the negative, the bad, with weaknesses; as though these weaknesses are our enemy

We force children into boring and stress-filled remediation instead of letting them "take off and soar" with what they are good at. Children (and adults) enjoy, like, and flourish when they can be successful. Being successful is much easier if the success activity is a strength

Keywords: Strength Theory

Managing Weaknesses

Great Expectations

Right Expectations

Closing the Gap Main Idea: Strengths are relative skills and abilities that we all have. We enjoy what we are good at, and we don't enjoy doing what we are not so good at.

We waste too much time and human resources by trying to rid our children (and ourselves) of weaknesses. We would be much better off as a society, and as individuals, if we focused on strengths.

There are also a lot of myths associated with eradicating weaknesses, and these have wreaked untold havoc upon the lives of children. These affects linger in the psyche of us as adults.

Quotes: Here are some useful quotes …

"Like a trap set for a mouse, our national system is rigged to catch people's weaknesses rather than to build on their strengths." (p. - 9)

"We continue to focus all our energies on fixing weaknesses while ignoring strengths. Why do we continue to work at some activities without getting much better at them? Why do 80 percent of our New Year's resolutions stay on our lists year after year?" (p. - 10)

"This myth takes many forms: If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Practice makes perfect. If you can conceive it, you can achieve it. If I can do it, you can do it." (p. - 15)

"When we focus on weaknesses, it takes on a life of its own and begins to smother our strengths." (p. - 17)

"The study of strengths creates a new theory of what people are like." (p. - 22)

"Great teachers show an ability to work with children as equals, even in preschool. Poor teachers present information to be memorized." (p. - 25)

"For example, a study of a sample of teachers shows they have problems with discipline. So many administrators want to require these teachers to take additional courses in school discipline. Look what happens: The college courses on discipline encourages teacher to develop more rules and ultimately become more controlling, making them less effective in the classroom. On the other hand, we found that outstanding teachers spent time working on their relationships with the students. They thought about how they could help the students grow rather than control them, which inspired the students to cooperate." (p. - 26)

"Success has its own rules, and highly successful people look at the world in a different way." (p. - 29)

"As you will discover, the Strengths' Theory applies on three different levels: as a philosophy for guiding your personal life, as a strategic tool for decision making, and as a system for developing those around you." (p. - 36)

"Many people, intrigued by the theory, ask if we're promoting the development of strong people over those who are less talented and are, therefore, promoting an elitist concept. That would assume that there are 'less strong people.'

Strengths' Theory is based on the premise that every person can do one thing better than any other 10,000 people." (p. - 36)

"It may take a while to sort your strengths because invariably you will have to let go of one activity or another that you dearly love. But when the decision is made, you will go for your goal now matter what. All at once, your questions and doubts are gone, and the past is cleared to move forward. This decisiveness nearly always follows a time of musing, tossing around the pros and cons. But soon you will be the manager, go for the promotion, tryout for the play, or launch a company. You will often feel fear, but fear with an interesting quality to it … It's the moment that fear, while still exciting, is superceded by the excitement of your new commitment — when you strike a direction and "go for it."" (p. - 61)

"When we speak of weakness, we do not mean everything that you don't do well, only what intrudes on your area of productivity or lessens your self-esteem; When you unearth a weakness, you must manage it and never think that it can be turned into a strength. True, some apparent weaknesses can be corrected with an extraordinary amount of time, energy and money, but there is no alchemy for weakness. The can be removed, but they cannot be transformed into strengths. The goal, therefore, is to manage weaknesses so the strengths can be freed up to develop and become so powerful that they make the weaknesses irrelevant." (p. - 72)

"Teachers weak in teaching skills pin the blame on the students." (p. - 77)

"It is one thing to write about weaknesses, but another to claim them." (p. - 85)

"Quickly admitting weak areas is an act of courage and growth. Those who embrace their nonstrengths are those who move on with developing their strengths." (p. - 89)

"Holding on to something that doesn't work is not an act of strength, it is an act of blocking. It is perpetuating a weakness that stands in the way of strength." (p. - 92)

"Goals die; Mission lives on" (p. - 113)

"The goal is not to proselytize or convert, but to express your true desires without regard to what others will think." (p. - 117) Here are the myths: Fixing weaknesses will make everything all right

Let strengths take care of themselves

Success is the opposite of failure

Anyone can do anything they put their minds to The ways that you uncover your strengths are to: Listen to your yearnings

Watch for satisfactions

Watch for rapid learning

Catch glimpses of excellence

Look for total performance excellence The ways to uncover weaknesses (as if they weren't apparent because of our obsession with them) are: Look for performance that we feel defensive about

Find areas where we learn slowly

Examine areas where we don't profit from repeated experience

Consider skills where we have to consciously think through the process

Experiences that reduce our confidence

Experiences where we don't perceive the activity in our future (we don't look forward to it)

Experiences where we feel "burnout" from practicing Issues Addressed by the Book: If we would adopt the theory presented in this book, we would; Learn how to find out how good people can be

Stop wasting our time working on weaknesses

Learn to double or triple productivity by working on strengths

Make more effective decisions by studying what is right instead of studying what is wrong Rules for improving and increasing our strengths include: Practicing a strength to perfect it

Enjoy and relive your successes

Picture and visualize your successes

Write and talk about your successes

Sticking to it and keeping on the path to self-improvement The Book's Shortcomings: This book is right on, but it is strange that the authors have made such little impact in the 15 year that have passed since the book was first published. Even with the support of the Gallup organization, this book has create little stir, hardly a ripple in our educational system or our society.

Perhaps this is because human nature changes so slowly.

Or perhaps there is an intrinsic "survival benefit" of focusing on weaknesses.

On the other hand, the authors fail to note that many of the current practices inherent in our form of education are artifacts and carryovers from a "factory model of education." In this model, quality control, making all products the same, takes precedence over making unique and individual products with qualities that are better in some areas but not uniform. Of course; modern, Information Age survival depends upon building those unique strengths.

Perhaps our society will catch on to the ideas that these authors present. Comments: We enjoy doing what we are good at, and we don't enjoy struggling with what we are not good at. This make sense, and this coincides with teachers' observations or children who are learning in the real world.

This may also explain the reason that the United State has so many "Learning Disabled" children, while Japan has none. In the United States, we create them.

By focusing on weakness (the disability), we integrate and solidify incapacities, while preventing the children that we have singled out from focusing on the activities and learning capacities that they enjoy (their strengths).

Wouldn't school be a nicer place if we didn't stratify children as "smart and talented, over achievers, average, under achievers, slow learners, dyslexic, Learning Disabled, Mentally Retarded, etc.

Ignoring these "technical definitions and jargon-based verbal shortcuts to understanding," we might be forced to celebrate children for who they are instead of for how they can perform on a battery of high-stakes tests. Summary:

Teachers who want to excel must take put this theory into practice. Master Teachers already focus upon the strengths of their students and themselves. Every teacher needs to do likewise. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4
Innovative - 3
Original - 2
Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.5

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Tuesday, July 31. 2007

Book Review

Loving What Is Author: Byron Katie (Reid)

ISBN: 0-609-60874-6 Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 2002 Publisher: : Harmony Books Pages: 258 Cost: \$24.00 USD (List)br /> Available: Amazon™ at as low as \$10.85 (new) - \$6.89 at eBay™ Subtitle: Four Questions that can Change your Life The Books' Topics: Controlling your Thoughts and Emotions Overcoming your Illusions and Delusions

Accepting "What Is"

Gaining Peace of Mind by Questioning Irrational Thoughts The central themes of this book are: Bringing your life under control is easier than you think. In fact, the key is your thinking

We all learned "goofy" ways of thinking, and no one ever helped us examine these beliefs about "the way things should be"

It only takes Four Questions to bring some rational order into the thoughts that "are driving us crazy"

Accepting "what is" is the result of this "examination of our thoughts," and amazingly, the peace we feel results in the change we sought

The cause and effect relationship turns out to be the reverse of what we expected, i.e., instead of achieving peace once we solved the issue, instead, when we reach an inner peace, the issue often seems to resolve itself Keywords: "The Work"

Four Questions

Internal and Rational Dialog

Personal Inquiry

The "Interpreter" role of our Brain Main Idea: We grow up without examining the attitudes, beliefs and values that we hold. We accept these formulations as "fact" when, in fact, these "solid realities" are our fantasies about "what is," and about the way "things should be."

Just questioning ourselves to discover if these ideas and assumptions are true leads to "peace of mind, insights, and creative breakthrough, often quickly and easily changing situations, and "changing people."

This dynamic interplay of people and the beliefs that lock us all into a matrix of drama are difficult to unravel for ourselves because we are so close to the "script" that we don't see the "unreality."

Byron Katie (a woman) dredged and wallowed through this process for herself, then formulated an "action research-based" method for others to follow

This method distills into "Four Questions" that, when we answer honestly, assist us at arriving at a place of peace and acceptance.

Quotes:

Byron Katie peppers the book with a lot of quotes that seem philosophical and insightful. In fact she quotes a Buddhist Sutra, sounds like she is a Zen master, and has the insight of a deep thinking philosopher. In fact, she claims that "The work" is really simple…

"To realize your true nature, you must wait for the right moment and the right conditions. When the time comes, you are awakened as if from a dream. You understand that what you have found is your own, and doesn't come from anywhere outside." (p. - xi)

"The Work is merely four questions; it's not even a thing. It has no strings. It's nothing without your answers. These four questions will join an program that you've got and enhance it. Any religion you have --they'll enhance it. if you have no religion, they will bring you joy. And they'll burn up anything that isn't true for you. They'll burn through to the reality that has always been waiting." (p. - xxiv)

"What I love about The Work is that it allows you to go inside and find your own happiness, to experience what already exists within you, unchanging, immovable, ever-present, ever-waiting. No teacher is necessary. You are the teacher you've been waiting for. You are the one that can end your own suffering." (p. - 1)

"I am a lover of what is, not because I'm a spiritual person, but because it hurts when I argue with reality." (p. - 2)

"If you are living your life and I am mentally living your life, who is here living mine? We're both over there. Being mentally in your business keeps me from being present in my own. I am separate from myself, wondering why my life doesn't work." (p. - 3)

"If you put your hand into a fire, does anyone have to tell you to move it? Do you have to decide? No: When your hand starts to burn, it moves. You don't have to direct it; the hand moves itself. In the same way, once you understand, through inquiry, that an untrue thought causes suffering, you move away from it. Before the thought, you weren't suffering; with the thought, you're suffering; when you recognize that the thought isn't true, again there is no suffering. That is how The Work functions." (p. - 6)

"I use the word inquiry as synonymous with The Work. To inquire or to investigate is to put a thought or story up against the four questions and turn around…Inquiry is a way to end confusion and to experience internal peace, even in a world of apparent chaos. Above all else, inquiry is about realizing that all the answers we ever need are always available inside us." (p. - 7)

"You're either attaching to your thoughts or inquiring. There is no other choice." (p. -

"The first step in The Work is to write down your judgments about any stressful situation in your life, past, present, or future--about a person you dislike or worry about, a situation with someone who angers or frightens or saddens you, or someone you're ambivalent or confused about. Write your judgments down, just the way you think them…Don't be surprised if you find this difficult. For thousands of years, we have been taught not to judge--but let's face it, we still do all the time. " (p. - 9)

"Even if you've forgiven that person 99 percent, you aren't free until your forgiveness is complete." (p. - 10)

"When you do The Work, you see who you are by seeing who you think other people are. Eventually you come to see that everything outside you is a reflection of your own thinking. You are the storyteller, the projector of all stories, and the world is the projected image of your thoughts." (p. - 10P)

"Please avoid the temptation to continue without writing down your judgments. If you try to do The Work in your head, without putting your thoughts on paper, the mind will outsmart you…The mind can justify itself faster than the speed of light." (p. - 11)

"The turnarounds are your prescription for health, peace, and happiness. Can you give yourself the medicine that you have been prescribing for others?" (p. - 16)

"Everything is a mirror image of yourself--your own thinking coming back at you. " (p. - 22)

"The Work allows you to go inside and experience the peace that already exists within you. That peace is unchanging, immovable, and ever-present. The Work takes you there. It is a true homecoming." (p. - 25)

"My experience is that the teachers we need most are the people we're living with now. Our spouses, parents, and children are the clearest masters we could hope for. Again and again, they will show us the truth we don't want to see, until we see it. " (p. - 27)

"Our parents, our children, our spouses, and our friends will press every button we have, again and again, until we realize what it is that we don't want to know about ourselves, yet. They will point us to our freedom every time." (p. - 29)

"Reality is kinder than the stories that we tell about it. " (p. - 64)

"There are three ways to do the turnaround. A judgment can be turned around to yourself, to the other, to the opposite. There are many possible combinations of these three. One statement can bring many realizations when it is reversed. The point is not to find the most turnarounds, but to find the ones that bring you the shift in self-realization, the enlightenment that sets you free from the nightmare you're innocently attached to. Turn the original statement around any way you want to until you find the turnaround that penetrates the most. " (p. - 77)Sidebar"The Four Questions and the Turnaround

- 1.) Is it true?
- 2.) Can you absolutely know that it's true?
- 3.) How do you react when you think about that?
- 4.) Who would you be without the thought?

and

Turn it around"p. - 15

(Note: Turn around works because you write as if it were written about you. It goes something like this…Original statement: I am angry at my students because they gripe and complain all the time.

Turn around statement: I am angry at myself because I gripe and complain all the time.Issues Addressed by the Book:This book addresses ways to alleviate the normal stresses, frustrations and pains that develop in our dealings, relationships and communications with others.

We don't get our way, and others seem to thwart our noble intentions with their dishonorable habits, unsavory customs and treacherous backstabbing.

Of course, we are not like that at all.

What this book shows us is that, "Yes, we are exactly like that, too."

What's more, the book shows us that when we accept the reality that we are exactly like the traits that we loath so much, then we remove the pressure on ourselves, and parts of these situations seem to clear up.

You have to see this in action to appreciate that it is so.

On the other hand, if we go back to our old habits of thought, we can as easily slip back to The Book's Shortcomings:The book consists of lots of dialog that are transcripts of the author asking the four questions to people in pain.

This is sort of boring, when we have our own pain.

Another problem with the book is that, as the author points out, our mind easily tricks us, and we probably can't uncover ourselves at the deepest levels, just by reading, if we go it alone.

But, the writing that the author suggests is time consuming and boring, if we do it alone.

I confess that I only played with the writing out of the judgments and mentally only tried to questions instead of writing them out, too. But, I wasn't seriously bothered by anything (Or is that just my mind tricking me?).

Another shortcoming is a lack of long-term follow-up with the people that were being helped to determine if these habit

of inquiry lasted over the long haul, or if these were only temporary improvement in habitual thought. Comments: An amended system of the four questions might be useful in a classroom where the teacher plans very small steps over the course of the school year to teach these self-inquiry skills to students.

But, opening a student to these questions, and uncovering something that a teacher is not equipped to deal with, i.e., rage, resentment, abuse, hostility, and prejudice might be too dangerous.

On the other hand, these techniques might fit perfectly well into an informal get together by colleagues on the faculty to explore attitudes, fear and frustrations. The problem with this approach is that the proceedings might not remain confidential, and there could be some repercussions if campus or district administrator learn of statements that you made. Summary: Loving What Is brings a level of awareness that often seems beyond the purview of teachers. The book seems more like a book for counselors and psychologists.

But, there is much that teachers can apply in their daily lives, and, the more pain that a teacher feels in their life, the more that they need to work through this book.

Just reading the book is boring, but resolving areas of pain and difficulty in your life makes up for that a lot.

Fortunately, the questions and the process are simple enough that partners and friends can work with each other on the process. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 2

Original - 2

Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.2

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Saturday, June 30, 2007

Book Review

The Science of Getting Rich Author: Wattles, Wallace D.

ISBN: N/A for this edition Format: Online, Free eBook Pub. Date: 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 Publisher: : The Science of Getting Rich Network Pages: 64 Cost: \$0.00 for the eBook Available: Amazon at as low as \$6.95 (new) - \$0.84 at eBay™, but don't buy this book at all. Just download an electronic copy Subtitle: Timeless wisdom and a practical prosperity program

from the forgotten 1910 classic!

Obtain your free copy from… Link to the Science of Getting Rich/ Certain Way Network The Books' Topics: Your right to be rich

How riches come to you

Acting in a "Certain Way" to become rich

Getting into the right business

Efficient action

Gratitude

The element of faith

How to use will power The central themes of this book are:

There is a "certain" method of thinking and acting that leads to wealth, and this method includes scientific strategies that are a "sure thing" for wealth

The methods of thinking and acting include the proper use of "will power" and a proper understanding of how the universe works

Ethical, honest and moral personal endeavors lead to success, while selfish, self-centered and dishonest ploys lead to poverty and lack

A person must cooperate with others, but any competition is detrimental to the wealth and happiness of everyone

Keywords: Scientific Methods of Thinking and Action

Acting in a Certain Way

Gratitude

Attracting Riches Main Idea: The main idea is that creative visualization of a goal that is for the good of everyone leads to opportunities to fulfill that goal.

The person must practice this method with mental focus, remain observant for opportunities that present themselves, and act with confidence once those opportunities arise.

The person that wants to be rich must remain ethical, must offer more value to the person that trades cash for his products or services, and must care for the welfare of other people.

Gratitude for each and every opportunity, benefit, stroke of good luck, blessing and gift is required since attitude is a primary component of this system.

The person that applies this method must avoid competing with others, but instead must help everyone and provide value to them. Quotes: Here is a summary of the entire method:

"There is a thinking stuff from which all things are made, and which, in its original state, permeates, penetrates, and fills the interspaces of the universe. A thought in this substance produces the thing that is imaged by the thought. A person can form things in his thought, and by impressing his thought upon formless substance can cause the thing he thinks about to be created. In order to do this, a person must pass from the competitive to the creative mind. Otherwise he cannot be in harmony with formless intelligence, which is always creative and never competitive in spirit. A person may come into full harmony with the formless substance by entertaining a lively and sincere gratitude for the blessings it bestows upon him. Gratitude unifies the minds of individuals

with the intelligence of substance, so that a person's thoughts are received by the formless. A person can remain upon the creative plane only by uniting himself with the formless intelligence through a deep and continuous feeling of gratitude. A person must form a clear and definite mental image of the things he wishes to have, to do, or to become, and he must hold this mental image in his thoughts, while being deeply grateful to the supreme that all his desires are granted to him. The person who wishes to get rich must spend his leisure hours in contemplating his vision, and in earnest thanksgiving that the reality is being given to him. Too much stress cannot be laid on the importance of frequent contemplation of the mental image, coupled with unwavering faith and devout gratitude. This is the process by which the impression is given to the formless and the creative forces set in motion. The creative energy works through the established channels of natural growth, and of the industrial and social order. All that is included in his mental image will surely be brought to the person who follows the instructions given above, and whose faith does not waver. What he wants will come to him through the

ways of established trade and commerce. In order to receive his own when it is ready to come to him, a person must be

in action in a way that causes him to more than fill his present place. He must keep in mind the purpose to get rich through realization of his mental image. And he must do, every day, all that can be done that day, taking care to do each act in a successful manner. He must give to every person a use value in excess of the cash value he receives, so that each transaction makes for more life, and he must hold the advancing thought so that the impression of increase will be communicated to all with whom he comes into contact. The men and women who practice the foregoing instructions will certainly get rich, and the riches they receive will be in exact proportion to the definiteness of their vision, the fixity of their purpose, the steadiness of their faith, and the depth of their gratitude." (p. - 63 & 64)

Issues Addressed by the Book: Almost every person wants to be wealthy and happy, and teachers are no exception. But, teachers live in a world where scarcity and lack are communicated with impact, where poverty thoughts are impregnated and incubated in their minds

The Book's Shortcomings: It is not possible to know if the methods work to gain wealth and riches without changing your attitude and your activities.

But, if someone has the confidence, the awareness to be looking for opportunities, and the perseverance to keep on trying; these qualities (bolstered by the belief system) could be responsible for the success that they experience. The advice about cooperating with others falls into the same category. Treating others kindly, providing value for services rendered creates loyal clients and customers, and customer good will is priceless.

The book also relates a "metaphysical" view of the real world that can be difficult for materialistic, scientific, and down-to-earth people to accept. And, this metaphysical view may run counter to the religious beliefs that many people hold.

Comments: Whether the metaphysical underpinnings of the author are correct or not, the "formula" of remaining alert to seize opportunities, taking action, holding positive goals in clear mental focus, and treating everyone with respect…especially providing more value for our efforts than we receive seems reasonable and dynamic.

More importantly, teachers who hold a similar attitude stand an increased chance of relating positively to their students, stand a chance of motivating students to become the best that they can be, and stand a chance of being noticed by their supervisors for their outstanding rapport with students.

On the other side of this belief system is the belief that other people, even your students, possess the same powers of mind. How wonderful when teachers have such confidence in their students that teachers communicate a level of respect and awe for the possibilities available in the lives of those students.

If teachers believe that their students can become wealthy, prosperous and that their students can lead fulfilled lives of service and benefit to our society, teachers will automatically motivate students to live up to that vision.

Summary: It would be useful if teachers used the quote from this book as a template, and rewrote it in their own words.

Add and delete sentences, correct the viewpoint, make the document personal.

Then, set up a plan for applying those personal principles each day of the school year.

If the riches that you seek as a teacher is in the learning of your students, then this kind of outline is your sure path and certain way to those riches.

And, if you just happen to "get rich" along the way, so much the better.

To obtain a free electronic copy of *The Science of Getting Rich* and some other free gifts for signing up… visit the *Science of Getting Rich/ Certain Way Network*

Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 3

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 2

Original - 2

Interesting - 2

Overall Rating - 2.8

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Thursday, May 31, 2007

Book Review

Simple•Ology: The Simple Science of Getting what you Want
Author: Joyner, Mark
ISBN: 0470095229
Format: Hardcover
Pub. Date: 2007
Publisher: John Wiley
Pages: 241
Cost: \$ (List)
Available: Amazon at as low as \$ (new) - \$3.99 at eBay(TM)
Subtitle: The Simple Science of Getting what you Want
The Books' Topics: Insanity and Science
Personal Brain Reprogramming
Logic

The Rules of Simple•Ology
The central themes of this book are: Wishing and wanting don't make situations happen
If you want something do what it takes to go directly after it

We live with the effects of illusion, delusion and disinformation, but, we can clear these mistakes from our mental programming

Clear thinking is possible, in fact easier, than clouded thinking
Keywords: Having it

Wanting it

Intelligence Trap

Pseudoscience

Utilitarian Model Flexibility

The Laws of Simple•Ology

Maintenance Plan for the New Brain
Main Idea:

Getting what we want in a real world requires that we think in correct, scientific, and logical ways.

Knowing that mistaken thinking, gaps in logic, and subverted thought patterns exist, we can take steps to correct our mental processing power.

Knowing the basic patterns of focused (correct) thought enables us to perceive the propaganda, disinformation, deceit and other methods that hope to influence us.

If we reprogram our thinking, if we examine what people say to us, examine what people say as they try to sell us stuff, if we learn to think; then our lives tend to be happier.
Quotes: "Reading is one thing. Understanding is another. And proper application is a whole 'nother [sic] thing entirely.

If you want to sound knowledgeable at dinner parties, stopping at the level of understanding is okay.

If, however, you want to achieve something unusual (for example, obscene sit-on-your-butt-for-the-of-your-life wealth, Tiger Woods greatness, Mick Jagger rock stardom, Donald Trump luxury), proper application is where it's at." (p. - vii)
"See, the problem isn't trying unusual things. The problem is doing things that don't serve our aims, but erroneously thinking that they do." (p. - 6)

"See, some form of intelligence is the inherent ability to argue your point…the smarter you are, the better you are at verbal justification, so this will in fact prevent you from learning and problem solving. It binds you to an unhealthy way of living—you just talk yourself into it." (p. - 24)

"Our model of the world is comprised not only of what we see, but also of what we hear, feel, and think. Sadly, and perhaps thankfully, this model will always, by definition, be incomplete." (p. - 40)

"Because our model of the world will always be incomplete, and therefore fallible, belief in one model or another (without flexibility) can cause us a great deal of pain." (p. - 47)

"We base our decisions on emotion, justify them with logic." (p. - 79)

"…much of the pseudo-scientific claptrap of today comes with the claim that 'you must believe' (or have faith) in order for it to work." (p. - 98)

"There's nothing wrong with positive thinking per se, but there is a problem with an inflexible, dogmatic model of the world—especially when that model itself is likely to result in some truly harmful decisions (like putting your trust in some dodgy new age gadget when your health is on the line)." (p. - 103)

"Both skeptics and believers are doing a real disservice to people by not teaching them how to find real answers to these questions themselves." (p. - 113)

"The conversation between a True Believer and a True Skeptic isn't much of a conversation, really. What you have is two people who are dead-set in their opinions ready to say just about anything to justify those opinions. It is not an exploration of ideas, but a chest-pounding shouting match." (p. - 114)

"Stupidity training is freely available today." (p. - 114)

"Now, I am not knocking every person out there who ever tried rubbing two crystals together to see if a dollar bill would pop out the third eye.

I'm also certainly not knocking anyone's faith. I'm just saying: Evaluate the feedback like a scientist! " (p. - 115)
Issues Addressed by the Book: This book addresses: The mechanism of substituting language and beliefs for reality

The tools that dishonest folks use to get others to do what they want

Ways that we can protect ourselves from these dishonest others

Ways that we can free ourselves from inflexible beliefs and rigid models of our world

Strategies for focusing our behavior on the actions that create the outcomes that we want. The sections on logic, with their practical examples, could be used as the basis for classroom lessons in almost any subject. All the teacher needs to do is substitute more politically acceptable examples for the ones that the author provides. The Book's

Shortcomings: The book may seem too flippant for some, and it can be easy to make light of

There also is an empathy/ sympathy disconnect between a multimillionaire author who retired early (really early), and most teachers who can't earn that much in two or three lifetimes of teaching (unless inflation really

skyrockets). Comments: This book can be used by teachers of most subject and content areas as a resource for developing lessons throughout the year. Analytical and structured thinking is a Twenty-First Century skill that all students (and the adults that teach them) need practice with.

Online free software accompanies the book. And, the software is available, even if you don't purchase the book. Link to the software:

The book also presents a number of delightful (instructional) cartoons, and these cartoons can be found on the Internet as well.

Link to the Mark Joyner Blog with access to the cartoons: /blockquote>Summary:

The book is a delightful, easy read. And, it doesn't hurt that a lot of insights crop up along the way.

The book may snag at the sensibilities of some teachers, but, compared to the raunchy and racy stuff that is broadcast on Prime Time television, this book is bland and tame.

However, the book is "ready for prime time" even if the airwaves are filled with fluff that isn't worth the wavelength bandwidth.

My favorite quote from the book should prove this point…

"If you want a bogus rah-rah self-help manual that blows a ray of sunshine up your back door, then you've got the wrong book. If you want a book that teaches you 'magical thinking'—one that teaches you how to hope, pray, and meditate on what you want and 'let the universe do the work for you' while you sit on your butt high on ganja and dogma, again, you've got the wrong book. If, however, you want to get things 'for real,' then you're in the right place." (p. - ix)

Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 4

Original - 4

Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.8

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 04:00

Monday, April 30, 2007

Book Review

Getting Everything you Can out of All You've Got
Author: Abraham, Jay | ISBN: 0-312-20465-5 | Format: Hardcover | Pub. Date: 2000 | Publisher: NY: Truman Talley Books/ St. Martin's Press | Pages: 376 | Cost: \$24.95 (List) | Available: Amazon at as low as \$10.85 (new paperback) - \$2.99 new, hardcover at eBay(TM) | Subtitle: 21 Ways you can Out-Perform, and Out-Earn the Competition
A business book, but the author presents strategies that work in education and instruction because teachers have to persuade others to accept their position.

The key is to get others to cooperate with you, and to willingly go along with your ideas.
The Books' Topics: Assessing your Current Strengths

Adjusting your Philosophy toward Life and the People you Work With

Creating No-Risk Offers

Maximizing Satisfaction for your Services

Testing Everything you Do

Heads Up, Eyes Open, Mind in Gear

Your Unique Definition of Success

How to Establish and Reach your Life Goals
The central themes of this book are: You have a lot of offer. And if you offer your talents, skills and abilities in more useful ways; you will be more successful. You will also be appreciated more

Strategic action outperforms working harder, working smarter or working longer

Valuing people (students, supervisors) and caring for their welfare increases these people's willingness and readiness to help you and their readiness to cooperate with you

Keywords: Unique Selling Proposition

Unrefusable Offer

Host-Beneficiary Relationships

Unique Definition of Success
Main Idea: You have a lot of talents and abilities, so why not embark on a strategy of applying these in a way that brings the most positive outcomes with the least effort.

And, if you have "other people's best interest at heart," you will be able to establish collaborative and cooperative relationships that benefit everyone.

When you find "Win-Win" solutions, you increase your productivity and success. You also increase the satisfaction that others have with your services. And satisfied others cooperate with you even more.
Quotes: Like other business books that we review, just substituting the words "teacher" or "education" allows us to apply the author's concepts to our academic focus. "You're about to begin a wonderful journey. You're going to learn that you have hidden assets, untapped opportunities, and overlooked possibilities that are not producing maximum results for you. That is going to change. You'll be shocked at how truly easy this is going to be. Too good to be true? It's not." (p. - 4)

"Realize this hard fact: The people above you (bosses, management, and organization leaders) want one thing most of all; they want solutions to problems. Solutions that make them look good and help them achieve their goals. They want the people that report to them to be problem solvers." (p. - 10)

"The philosophy of this book allows you to avoid the costly learning curve in almost everything you do. And that saves you time and money; I'm referring to the process of borrowing success practices from other industries and applying them to yours." (p. - 12)

"Client: A person who is under the protection of another." (p. - 17)

"To get your prospects and clients to see you or your business as offering them a superior benefit or advantage that no other competitor offers them is the essence of a unique selling proposition (USP). You must determine the most powerful benefit or advantage that you can possibly offer on existing or future client so that it will be totally irrational for them to choose to do business with anyone but you or your company. And here's how you do that. You identify what advantage or result your clients want the most." (p. - 19)

"You don't have to change your product or service, but you have to position your product or service as having a unique benefit they're not getting from your competitors. And you don't offer it to your clients subtly. You incorporate the fact that you are now offering them this unique advantage of benefit in everything you say and everything you do. When you do this you clearly educate them so they see, appreciate, and want to seize that advantage." (p. - 19)

"Advancing at a measured pace; step by step, from where you are to a little bit better; may seem the logical and safe way to proceed. But you can and should think in terms of skipping levels and making quantum leaps. You can move rapidly and easily, and surprisingly safely from your present level of accomplishment to a place that is several stages higher. You can do it instantly; and directly. And you can do it in virtually every aspect of your business or career activities. You can do it by not limiting yourself to following only those practices people in your industry follow. I want you to stop accepting your present-day business circumstances as the way it has to be. You're going for major breakthroughs. A business strategy that is common as dirt in one industry can have the effect of an atom bomb in an industry or business application where it's never been used before." (p. - 35 & 36)

"You probably spend too little time studying the most successful, innovative, and profitable ideas people in other industries use to grow and prosper. Yet, if you start focusing on other industries' success practices, you'll be amazed at how easily you can adapt these ideas to your own business situation. Suddenly, you'll see significantly better ways to produce significantly bettered results from the same time, manpower, effort, activity, and capital." (p. - 36)

"Breakthroughs are unconventionally fresh, superior, more exciting ways of doing something. Breakthroughs are the dramatic improvements in each area that make you more powerful, efficient, effective, and productive, and more valuable or inspiring to your client." (p. - 37)

"…So you must invent and constantly be reinventing you own better future. That means becoming ethically opportunistic, looking at everything around you (in and outside you business or industry) with an opportunity-based focus and asking yourself continuously, 'Where's the big overlooked opportunity here?' It's also adopting a possibility-based mind-set that looks for new, different, and better ways to attain a goal or solution or address a situation. It's starting to see opportunities where everyone else sees problems, obstacles, limitations, or boundaries. It's recognizing how much you can achieve by leveraging the impact of whatever is going on around you. The most exciting breakthroughs occur when you reach beyond the traditional way of looking at or doing something and become open and receptive to new possibilities." (p. - 39)

"Most major breakthroughs are a result of looking at things with a commonsense, 'superlogical' degree of open-mindedness. And the ability to take action on what you see. They have little to do with advanced education, high IQ, or vast amounts of money. And the most dramatic breakthroughs frequently center, pure and simple, on better ways to do things—faster, easier, or more effectively or logically." (p. - 40)

"You need to reach out for ideas and answers. Examine ideas, people, procedures, and philosophies from as far outside your normal sphere of business and life as you can possibly reach. Discover a genuine interest, fascination, and curiosity for how other things outside your limited business world work and the principles they're based upon." (p. - 44)

"Stretch yourself and start examining subjects, industries, and markets you've never been interested in before. Why? Because you'll get fresh new perspective, ideas, and insights…Ask yourself powerful questions about how other people use things, do things, sell things, deliver things, make things, compete and prosper." (p. - 45)

"There are an unlimited number of breakthroughs out there…just waiting for you to discover them…So many breakthroughs, so little time to discover them all. So much to borrow from and funnel into your newfound maximizer's mind-set. That's why you need to start doing it right now. And keep doing it, forever!" (p. - 45)

"Whatever you do, if you focus on giving value and advice instead of manipulating and maneuvering, you win over many more prospects, clients, bosses, colleagues, and friends. And you will be rewarded in ways you never dreamed. " (p. - 59 & 60)

"You can't maximize your performance or make the most money unless you know how to make the best use of your time, opportunities, efforts, and investments. You can't get the best results until you comprehensively evaluate all the different approaches you have available in all your business activities…The odds are great that you are currently under performing and not reaching your real potential because you're depending on the wrong actions or approaches for your success. " (p. - 145)

"Test Everything, Starting Right Now " (p. - 147)

"Never test big if you can test small. " (p. - 151)

"When you change your sense of self-worth, you also alter the way you look at your relationships with your clients. " (p. - 191)

"If you're timid, take little steps in the beginning (you can test any of the principles on a small scale with no financial of career risk). You'll see the strategies work. You'll gain confidence in them and yourself. Then you can start to take bigger steps. But don't just sit there doing nothing. Take the first step, no matter how small it may be. Take it. A very wise man said, 'Far more is accomplished through movement than was ever accomplished through meditation.' And while I think meditation, contemplation, and formulation are all quite essential to the success process, unless you act you'll never realize any rewards." (p. - 342) Issues Addressed by the Book: Jay Abraham knows how to communicate with clients, and for teachers, our clients are: Students

Parents

Administrators So, we learn that we need to change our attitude as we continually figure out how to make life better for our clients.

The cue to this task is that we hold our clients (these groups, these individuals) "in our care."

This attitude creates a mind-set that launches cooperation and commitment from the members of these groups.

This mind-set also improves our perspective so that we begin to see mutual, cooperative, beneficial opportunities for joint benefit.

The Book's Shortcomings:

The book is a bit long-winded, although easy to read.

The author uses lots of contractions, even in the title, possibly so that the author models his belief that advertising writing is "like one friend having an intimate conversation with another friend."

There is more to the book than a pep talk and case studies, though. The book provides such extensive lists of need to take action on now" topics that a teacher would have to dedicate a year or two in developing a new repertoire of "thinking and doing" behaviors. Comments: Some of the sections of this book are more applicable to teachers than

others. But, as teachers implement the obvious changes in improved collaboration and care giving, more of the author's recommendations will become applicable.

The author provides a lengthy list of "Action Items," mostly to stimulate thinking. The author is less helpful on providing that missing step between knowing what to do and actually doing it. I suppose that the author, writing for business folks, assumes that his readers will be motivated by major increases in earnings. (It is logical to assume that as the business person begins to make more and more money, that they will implement another strategy.)

Teachers will need to read this book and build their own checklists and action items, tailor-made to the issues that affect teaching. Summary: Teachers interested in a long-term, personal improvement and personal effectiveness project would do well to study this book.

But, the integration of these attitudes into best-practices, like all the side trips that we make on the road to becoming a Master Teacher are worth the challenges.

And, Jay Abraham is "right on" in his observation that we speed our creativity and boost our service genius by looking at tested and accepted practices in other fields and industries (because they have done the hard work of development), and "borrow at will."

Sidebar Note: See our article on the tricks and traps of copying another project. [Link to the What does it Take to Replicate a Pilot or Model Program?](#) article Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 4

Original - 3

Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.7

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Saturday, March 31, 2007

Book Review

Waiting for your Cat to Bark? Author: Eisenberg, Bryan and Eisenberg, Jeffrey ISBN: 0-7852-1897-1 Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 2006 Publisher: : Nelson Business Pages: 225 Cost: \$19.99 (List)

Available: Amazon at as low as \$3.95 (new) - \$4.99 (new) at eBay(TM) Subtitle: Persuading Customers When they Ignore Marketing Why are we reviewing another "business book" for teachers?

Answer: 1.) Because the authors describe streamlined processes that teachers need to employ in improving instruction.

2.) The authors describe thinking and methods that clarify ideas and issues that teachers face. 3.) The ideas that can help teachers are presented more clearly in this book than anywhere else. The Books' Topics: This book contains 29 chapters and a lot of ideas that the authors present with a unique slant. Substitute the word "teaching" for "marketing," and the ideas become important for education. Substitute the word "students" for the word "customers&, well, you get the idea. We've taken the liberty to do this transformation for you. These include: The Fiction of the Student Experience

Why Teaching is Simple but Hard

Students in Control

Personalizing Learning

Accountable Education Topics that we didn't transform words to describe: Maintaining Persuasive Momentum

The Design of Persuasive Systems

Disclosing the Necessary

The Human Operating System

Wireframing as an Interactivity Map

Persuasive Architecture: a Six-Step Process The central themes of this book are: The age of control (in education or business) has passed. If we want to reach all our audience, we need to develop different ways of persuading, teaching, communicating

We must understand that simple and simplistic mental maps (idealized theories, academic constructs) fail to provide guidance in how we relate, communicate and persuade

We become more successful if we… Look at our clients, customers, students as several (distinctive) personality types

Create "scenarios" that describe the major types of clients, customers, students that we serve

Perceive motivation as a series of steps, instead of an "all-or-nothing" single step Assess, pay attention, ask a lot of questions (and test to find out the answers) and map our strategy in concrete, specific, measurable terms

Results increase as we personalize our services, target our performance to individual needs and motivations, and adjust our activities to the real-world, not the the world that we wish we worked in Keywords: Personas and Personalization

Persuasion Architecture

Topology of Knowledge

Wireframing and Mapping our Application Path

Storyboarding and Prototyping Service Delivery Scenarios Main Idea: Students, clients, customers fall into two general types… Dogs: trusting, obedient, willing to please

Cats: aloof, disdainful, could care less what you think Of course, there are more types, but this categorization allows you to break the "fantasy-wish-delusion" that people should be different, somehow better, so that you could produce on your job.

Assessment and an open mind, matched to a flexible, willing to change course when observable, measurable data indicates that our results are stagnant, going in the wrong direction will put us on the path to success, but will not guarantee success

Mapping unique and individual strategies for each group of students, clients, customers means really writing these down, drawing these out on paper, and tracing persuasion, learning, and development paths for each pattern

Following these procedures, we become skilled at combining delivery and performance services at places where these paths intersect and coincide, and we become skilled at branching off and serving one-of-a-kind subgroups when we need to. Quotes: "One basic difference between cats and dogs is motivation. Centuries of cat and dog humor captures

the the stereotypes: A dog wants to please you; a cat could care less. Dogs are devoted and loving and selfless. Cats are aloof, indifferent, and self-indulgent. Dogs are social and act in ways that maintain and support the social order. Cats are solitary and act in ways that benefit themselves." (p. - 10)

"Marketing and advertising folks have used Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a formula for motivating their customers to buy: Target the appropriate need, and you can create the compelling associative cues that elicit desire.

Target a level too low, and you risk creating messages that customers ignore (their needs are already satisfied). Target too high on the pyramid, and customers may not be ready to hear you (they're still focused on meeting a more basic need." (p. - 15)

"While you are busy 'selling,' customers are engaged in the related, but by no means identical process of 'buying.' Customers need to resolve their own concerns so that they can build confidence to buy from you. Ideally, they'll build that confidence with information that you provide. But if you don't provide it, they'll track it down by going to other sources" (p. - 42)

"The classic business-school model that has influenced countless sales people, advertisers, and marketers is the concept of AIDA, an acronym that stands for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. In essence it is the formula of how you persuade the customer to buy." (p. - 52)

"You build and sustain persuasive momentum by intentionally and repeatedly providing answers to these three questions:

Who are we trying to persuade to take action?

What is the action that we want this person to take?

What does that person need in order to feel confident taking that action?

These simple questions are the foundational building blocks of Persuasion Architecture. Only by mastering these three questions can we align our customers' buying process with our sales process." (p. - 54 & 55)

"Marketers have always claimed, and honestly believe, that they listen to their customers. However, most of this 'listening' is carried out in unnatural circumstances--in focus groups or through surveys." (p. - 80)

"The dictionary definitions of persona are revealing. Personas are characters; they have a voice, they are representations or stand-ins for somebody else, and they play a role that, while connected to, is also distinct from their inner selves. They are images, personalities." (p. - 105)

"When you appeal to emotions, you help your customers make their decisions. The easiest path to making an emotional connection is by focusing on benefits--not features--of your product or service. Benefits are based on people; features are based on things." (p. - 115)

"Can you imagine tackling the construction of an office building without a set of blueprints in hand? Can you imagine drawing up those blueprints with only a cursory understanding of all the questions you have to answer before you put a single line on paper? Of course you can't. You intuitively know this would at best limit how your structure worked and at worst doom your project to failure. What you want is a comprehensive picture of every detail that could reinforce or undermine your success before you start dealing with the tangibles. We operate in a world full of unknowables. So uncovering is the process of understanding what is knowable, and seeking to understand that from every possible known perspective; it's simply waiting for someone to pull back the covers--to uncover it. People don't get terribly excited when we first bring up uncovering. Perhaps it seems vague or even mystical to them. Perhaps they think that it's a time waster. Perhaps they already know it all. Perhaps they fear what they will learn. Perhaps they prefer to get right to what they think is the heart of the matter. We cannot overemphasize the importance of uncovering. It is the foundation for every step of Persuasion Architecture. Without uncovering, not only do you lack a useful set of blueprints, you operate blind. Uncovering sets the course for everything else that you do. Start by sending your project in the wrong direction, and it will be nearly impossible to steer it back on course again." (p. - 118 & 119)

"Observations about temperament and type preference are now understood as a function of brain lateralization, or how the brain uses its separate but connected right and left hemispheres. Both sides of our brains are different, just as our brain is asymmetrical--our right and left sides are not mirror images of each other. These asymmetrical design limitations of brain and body create the dynamic of the human operating system. Our 'limitations' define what's possible. For all of us, our abilities and preferences line between the extreme of the right and the extreme of the left. Humans are amazingly complex creatures and any classification scheme unavoidably simplifies this complexity. In addition, each person is more than one classic personality type. We are delightful mixtures--one type may predominate, but others come into play, often influenced by environmental factors, social factors, even ephemeral moods." (p. - 144 & 145)

"We've dug deeply into the matter of whom we are trying to persuade. Now we can begin to deal systematically with the actions that we want our personas to take, and what they need so they feel comfortable taking that action. Actions and needs establish the parameters for interaction. We want to create a map of that interacting, through planned scenarios that acknowledge and meet every opportunity. This is the process of wireframing." (p. - 182)

"W. Edwards Deming, considered by many the Father of the Quality Revolution, believed if individuals can't interact with a system successfully, the problem lies not in the people using the system, but in the system itself. He also said, 'If you can't describe what you are doing as a process, you don't know what you are doing. If you think that you can't achieve a framework for prediction, it means that you probably don't understand the system.' " (p. - 207 & 208)

"Because Persuasion Architecture offers a more holistic description for the entire system, it allows us to identify the component parts of the system that need measuring and improving. You can identify and measure specific service and process defects, then ask, 'Why are they happening?' The answer to that question may uncover underlying reasons for customer dissatisfaction and defection. We often find there's more than one reason or root cause contributing to a service defect." (p. -)

Issues Addressed by the Book: The issues of motivating (selling) students to learn and study is key to improving education. Especially in a time when individual paths to unique learning are possible because of Internet access and technology.

Understanding that all students are unique, but building assumptions based upon measurable assessment provides the most economic strategy (in terms of time and talent that we expend) in facilitating learning. The Book's Shortcomings: The book presents a complex analysis, probably too complex.

Although the book is worth studying and applying, it probably won't appeal to the "cookie cutter crowd" that wants "no-brainer" answers to all issues.

But, for the person that wants to perfect their Application and Performance (AnP) skills, this book offers a viable starting point. Comments: The authors provide a reasoned, analytical and unique approach to understanding the inner workings of people and forming concrete strategies to persuade them. This is exactly what teachers need to do.

No learning theory takes the place of direct observation of students and their internal thinking and learning process. And nothing takes the place of direct communication with students. Multiple choice, multiple guess testing provides little or no evidence to guide instruction, and, compared to the process that these authors describe, is a paltry substitute for acquiring real-world assessment data.

In the realm of high-stakes testing, providing the strategy maps, measurable paths and objective points where motivation, instructional delivery and instructional management must be differentiated should be big pluses. Summary: This book is another of those business books that capture the correct meaning of "education should be operated as a business." Most often, those pundits are thinking of the "business of manufacturing" or the "business of banking," and are out of touch with the real world of teaching.

These authors see the delivery of products and services to reluctant, reluctant, recalcitrant customers (our students) as requiring a personalized understanding and a focused effort at persuasion. This is the kind of "business sense" that makes sense in education. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 4

Original - 4

Interesting - 4

Overall Rating - 4.0

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Wednesday, February 28, 2007

Book Review

The Power of Innovative Thinking
Author: Wheeler, Jim
ISBN: 7607-4552-8
Format: Hardcover
Pub. Date: 1998
Publisher: Barnes and Noble Books
Pages: 125
Cost: \$10.99 (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$0.33 (new) - Why bother with eBay™ with the price of a new copy so low?
Subtitle: Let New Ideas Lead you to Success
The Books'

Topics: Thinking Styles

Strategic Thinking

Power Thinking

Creative Thinking

Analytical Thinking
The central themes of this book are: We are not born knowing how to think, but we can learn

Strategies for thinking can be developed in a systematic way

There are four major types of thinking

People develop their own thinking style, but this style can be improved upon
Keywords: Re-thinking Thinking

Power Thinking

Problem-Solving, Opportunity Thinking and Decision-Making

The Thinking Box
Main Idea: Each type of thinking skill involves specific tools and techniques that can be learned, practiced and perfected

The types of thinking are: Strategic Thinking

Power Thinking

Creative Thinking

Analytical Thinking

The "Thinking Box" involves considering…One's Personal Life

One's Career

Problem-Solving

Personal Growth
Quotes: "If you keep thinking in the same old way, you'll arrive at the same old conclusions and leave behind a well-worn rut of business-as-usual decisions. Trains must go where the tracks lead; they cannot follow unplanned routes." (p. - 7)

"Thinking is the conscious use of our minds to reason, deliberate, debate, predict and reflect on a subject. By better understanding why humans think the way they do, you'll learn how to approach problems in ways that lead to better decision-making. By smoothing out the ruts that have formed in the past, you'll be better equipped to "re-think" your responses when faced with new problems and opportunities. You don't need to be a victim of doing what has always been done." (p. -

"Human beings have built-in survival filters to prevent sensory overload.…We also have memory filters that serve as our 'auto-pilot. They let us perform routine tasks while we're consciously thinking of something else…Memory filters are time-savers that can cause us to make mistakes and miss opportunities." (p. - 13)

"When forced to make a decision, people take different mental routes to arrive at that decision. Like travelers you may know, some take the most direct route to get where they're going. Others think of all the routes available, select the best one and then go. Still others take the scenic tour and enjoy the journey. And, some people jump in the car and just go, giving very little thought to direction or destination." (p. - 27)

"'Power' is being able to influence people or situations. It's not reserved for people in authority or those with the biggest stick. Power is something we all have and should be seen as neither good or bad. When we abuse power, it is bad; but when we use power to turn vision into reality, it is good." (p. - 69)

"'Strategic' means planning for the future, and strategic thinking is thinking about planning for the future. When you know where we are going, why you're going and how you're going to get there, you will get there, successfully--and strategic thinking tools will give you the where, why and how. Successful people learn to use their thinking skills so that their actions will not go astray, but will lead to desired goals." (p. - 51)

"In order to maximize your power-thinking skills, you need to be positive about yourself and your abilities…How you see yourself and the confidence you have in your ability to be successful will influence your power-thinking skills. When we see ourselves as successful, we will be successful. The power of positive mental pictures has been recognized for a long time. Athletes and public speakers are some of the people who practice their skills with positive mental images of success." (p. - 84)

"'Creative thinking' is using your thinking skills to make new and useful connections--creative solutions from information that you already know…All people are creative, but in different ways. You may be creative when it comes to putting words on paper while an associate is creative in designing buildings. Once you recognize that you are creative, you can apply your thinking skills to come up with new solutions to problems." (p. - 89)

"'Analytical thinking' is the mental activity that helps us make correct decisions. We can use our creative thinking skills to

come up with hundreds of solutions to our problems, but we need to use our analytical-thinking skills to select the best solution." (p. - 107)Issues Addressed by the Book:The author distills thinking skills to a variety of strategies and models that are useful for teachers.

Teachers could purchase this book for \$0.33, place the book in the classroom library. Teachers could also develop an "applied curriculum" using the basic patterns that are described and outlined in the book.

The benefit that teachers derive of the brief nature of the book is that it is easy to refer to, easy to extract patterns and information from, and easily to apply in almost any content area class.

The strategies, diagrams and outlines presented in the book are easy to adapt to specific lesson plans and classroom needs.The Book's Shortcomings:The book presents only a single exercise or two for each of the various types of thinking. Teachers would appreciate lots more variety and more exercises for applying the principles that the author presents.

Also, since the book was geared for a business readership, the application of thinking skills to test-taking is not addressed.

In addition, the book could have provided additional strategies for communicating the results of strategic, power, creative and analytic thinking, i.e., with graphs, charts, graphic organizers and other communication aids.Comments:The book focuses upon thinking skills for business, but, "thinking is thinking" and the skills apply to teaching and learning just fine.

The book's concepts, such as the "Thinking Box" are readily adaptable to most content area subjects.

The book's format lends itself to easy skimming and easy adaptation for most classes.

The book is also easy enough to comprehend that upper elementary, middle school and high school students can use it for project-based learning assignments.

The author points out that everyone is different, and that everyone thinks differently. This is a lesson that teachers need to remind themselves (and our politicians) about. The author missed an opportunity here to explore "Multiple Intelligences" and provide many examples of these divergent thinking skills in successful, real life applications.

Summary:This book can be part of most teacher's classroom or reference library. The price is right, and the book provides a good start.

The author writes in a personal, conversational style that aids in understanding the concepts that he presents.Rating (Four Point scale):Useful - 3

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 3

Original - 3

Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.3

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Wednesday, January 31, 2007

Book Review

Balanced Scorecard in a Week, 2nd Ed. Author: Bourne, Mike & Bourne, Pippa ISBN: 10-0-340-849452 Format: Soft cover Pub. Date: 2003 Publisher: : Hodder Arnold Pages: 95 Cost: \$ 9.99 (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$7.96 (new) - not currently available at eBay(TM) Balanced Scorecard represents an antidote to the fiscal-only management of businesses and organizations. The idea is that many other factors besides money can be measured so that organizations can improve their performance.

This concept is applicable to school districts where measurement's "two trick horse" of test scores and fiscal restraint tramples the educational progress of our students. The Books' Topics: What is the Balanced Scorecard?

How to get started using the Balanced Scorecard

Deciding what is Important

How to Measure

Displaying (and using) Measures

Keeping the Scorecard Relevant

Problems and Issues from Using the Balanced Scorecard The central themes of this book are: Improving organizational and business performance requires measurement. But measurement restricted to financial variables is not adequate for managing an organization

To make a measurement process work, you have to measure the right things

Measuring the wrong things leads to lots of wasted time and opportunity costs

The Balanced Scorecard approach does not work in every case, but most organizations can see improvement when the Balanced Scorecard process is implemented

Keywords: Balanced Scorecard

Performance Measurement System

Key Drivers

Targets, Measures and Desired States Main Idea: The idea behind the Balanced Scorecard is basic and simple, i.e., what organizations and companies measure gets done. But, the right things have to be measured.

Once the right things are identified, the measuring process has to be workable so that the measuring does not interfere with ongoing operations. The measuring process cannot be so cumbersome and complex that it ties up managers and employees so that they cannot get their work done.

Thought and planning are necessary before a system is implemented because it is possible to measure the wrong things and actually diminish progress.

The buy-in of all stakeholders also is necessary if the right measurements are going to be used to effect worthwhile change. Quotes: "Over the last 10 years, companies have come to realize that they can no longer manage using financial measures alone. To survive and prosper, companies have to track non financial measures"; The Balanced Scorecard is a framework for designing a set of measures for activities chosen by you as being key drivers of your business. For the scorecard to be effective, you will need to display these measures and manage the resulting actions to improve performance." (p. - 5)

"Unless you measure accurately and consistently, the whole ethos of measurement will be undermined. Before you start making comparisons between departments or between your company and someone else's you need to establish your current position through clearly defined and appropriate performance measure." (p. -

"How many times have you seen a well-constructed strategic plan, created and read by a few but ineffectively communicated across the business? Performance measures can rectify this, making the goals and objectives explicit, bringing the strategy to life and communicating direction throughout the whole business." (p. - 9)

"Having a set of measures is one thing, but the real benefit comes from reflecting on what the measures are telling you and deciding what action you should take." (p. - 9 & 10)

"The Balanced Scorecard was originally developed for the business sector, for profit-oriented organizations. However, there is no reason why it shouldn't be used for charities or public sector organisations. [sic]" (p. - 17)

"Perhaps the most important factor for success in using the Balanced Scorecard is ensuring that you are measuring the right things. If you measure the wrong things you can channel energy and time into activities that are not contributing to the success of your business, with damaging results." (p. - 27 & 28)

"Many people think that the process is over once you have set the objectives, but this is not the case." (p. - 39)

"Clear thinking is vital for deciding what to measure." (p. - 40)

"Although it is useful to consider the design of each measure individually, you will find that measures often overlap in the application. It is not uncommon for more than one measure to be used to track one dimension of performance." (p. - 55)

"Deciding what to measure is not enough. You must also take care in designing the measures themselves." (p. - 57)

"If positive action is to be taken after analyzing the measures then everyone concerned with improving performance needs to fully understand what the results mean." (p. - 60)

"When deciding what to measure, give some thought to the amount of time each measure will take -- if it is very time consuming is it really worthwhile or can it be measured less often?" (p. - 68)

"Concern about what will happen if results aren't good can lead to distortion of the figures or excuses as to why the measures are no good. Of course some of these excuses might be genuine, particularly at the early stages before wrinkles have been ironed out. The important point is for individuals to see that the results are being used objectively for improving the business and not to allocate blame…No matter how carefully you design your measures, problems in collecting the data can distort your results" (p. - 68 & 69)

"In fact, each time you review and update your strategic plan, the measures should also be reviewed to ensure they remain congruent. This may well mean dropping some well-established measures and implementing new ones. If this isn't done, then don't be surprised if the strategy fails, The [sic] old measures and reporting system will ensure that what has been decided is never implemented." (p. - 75)

"Another important way to keep your scorecard going is to weave it into the everyday processes of your business rather than to regard it as an initiative in itself…The danger is that if you create the Balanced Scorecard as a separate initiative it will receive attention only for a short time and then will fade when the next fad appears on the horizon. If you link initiative or processes together so that they are complimentary you develop a certain strength and cohesion and the positive results are cumulative. This helps build management competence in running the business." (p. - 78 & 79)Issues Addressed by the Book:This book summarizes the thinking behind using more than financial data in managing a business.

The key to understanding how measures can be used to improve the function of an organization is to understand that an organization operates from more than one perspective.

The book itself recognizes that the original Balanced Scorecard does not address the perspectives of people, suppliers, regulators, or other entities. One of the biggest omissions for the original scorecard was the perspective of competitors. In the case of school districts, it is clear that the teacher's perspective has been absent in the "drum-beating, circus parade" know as "benchmark testing."SidebarFor further examination of the issues affecting Benchmark Testing, see our article, The Flaws, Fallacies and Foolishness of Benchmark Testing.

Note: Benchmark Testing, as performed by most schools, fails to rise to the level of being called a Balanced Scorecard.The Book's Shortcomings:If you consider the format as a digest-volume that is intended to cover a complex subject in seven bite-sized chapters, this book doesn't have any shortcomings.

The book gets the job done, is easy to read, and the main points are highlighted.

If there were a criticism, it would be that the book doesn't dig deeply enough into the difficulties of implementing any initiative where people's behavior must change. The Balanced Scorecard assumes that all folks who are working for an organization want success and assumes that these individuals are willing to make whatever changes are required to obtain that success.

Observation of human nature, in school districts and without, verifies that this assumption about people's willingness to changes is unfounded.Comments:The author gets a number of items correct about school districts, even if his information targets businesses. These include warnings about…Measuring the wrong thing

Misusing data and assigning blame

Not understanding what the data mean

Measuring the same old stuff, even after the plan changes

Measuring only items that fit the perspective of one group, especially if another group is responsible for the implementation of the organization's missionThe frustration in reading a simple volume like Balanced Scorecard in a Week is knowing that the challenges facing school districts could be resolved with simple thinking and basic common sense…but knowing that the changes needed just won't get done.Summary:The book also allows us to interpolate the difficulties that school districts will face when coming up with key perspectives. There will be so many perspectives, so many divergent views and so little knowledge behind these divergent opinions that nothing is apt to be done.

This book is an easy read, and offers a common sense approach to identifying strategic goal, discovering measures of progress toward those goals, and consistently executing improvements until those goals are reached.Rating (Four Point scale):Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 3

Original - 3

Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.5

Sunday, December 31, 2006

Book Review

Improv Wisdom Author: Madson, Patricia Ryan

ISBN: 1-4000-8188-2 Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 2005

Publisher: Bell Tower: NY Pages: 157 Cost: \$16.00 USD (List)

Available: Amazon at as low as \$11.36 (new) - \$7.68 (new) at eBay(TM) Subtitle: Just Show Up Like the sales book, the Little Red Book of Selling: 12.5 Principles of Sales Greatness--How to make sales FOREVER that we reviewed in a previous newsletter (Link to the Volume 2, No. 2 newsletter), the word "Teacher" can be substituted in most sentences of this book and the message (recommendation, suggestion, instruction) applies to teachers. The Books' Topics: The book offers suggestions for "winging it" in most situations. After you prepare, set the groundwork; you rely on your creativity, inspiration and talent. You will be amazed at your abilities if you apply these strategies… Say Yes

Don't Prepare

Start Anywhere

Be Average

Pay Attention

Face the Facts

Stay on Course

Make Mistakes

Act Now

Take Care of Each Other

Enjoy the Ride The central themes of this book are: You possess the skills, talents and abilities to "fly by the seat of your pants", and, in many cases, the outcomes will be better than if you "played it safe" and avoided risk. Your talents and abilities are better than you know

Your creative abilities spring up, and seem to always be available when you need them

Other people respond to spontaneity with compassion, kindness, empathy and caring

The "playing it safe way" bores your audiences

Improvising puts you in contact with your audience (students), and creates a mutual dialog during your performance (teaching) Keywords: Improv, Improvisation

Creative Intelligence

Communication and Presentation

Creative Performance Main Idea: Improv Wisdom is a how-to manual and a workbook. Key concepts, exercises, and a rationale for thinking and acting in creative and self-supporting ways are outlined.

Master teaching relies on just the pattern of communication and behavioral skills that the author presents Teachers must adopt the flexibility, listening skills, honesty and "leaning from mistakes" strategies that the author presents or they will never become master teachers. Creativity, problem-solving, and intuitive decisions only spring from the stress-free freedom of thought and action that the author describes.

The ideas and actions that the author presents, if put into daily practice by teachers, can

Modeling "improv" behaviors and actions, and helping students build a repertoire of the same skills would serve education (and the lives of our students) far more than stressing students with the need to "perfect" their test-taking performance. Quotes: "I know that improvisation has nothing to do with glibness, or comic ability. A good improviser is someone who is awake, not entirely self-focused, and moved by desire to do something useful and give something back and who acts upon impulse." (p. - 15)

"They are can do people… There is a spirit of cooperation. If I forget something, my colleague covers me… We smile and laugh a lot. we rarely need committee meetings to decide things. We do stuff. We make mistakes, sometimes whoppers. We correct them, or we capitalize on them. We notice how much others are doing for us. We have fun. We screw up; we apologize. We get on one another's' nerves sometimes. We move on. We create life and art together." (p. - 17)

"Everyone, unless performing a scripted play, makes up his life as he goes along. We are all improvising. Why not do it like a professional? Improvisation is a metaphor, a path, and a system; it is a *modus operandi* [italics added] that anyone can learn." (p. - 18)

"… we find ourselves nearly strangled by the planning instinct… We plan when we should execute. We make lists, worry, or theorize (often endlessly) when we ought to be responding. We choose safety above all else. We seem to have lost the knack of looking at the day with fresh eyes or doing anything out of our comfort zone." (p. - 21)

"An excellent manual for swimming is useless until you jump into the pool. Getting wet is what it is all about." (p. - 23)

"Keep in mind that improvisation is a tool that should always be put into service with a healthy dose of common sense. It is a way of doing things that emphasizes a flexible mind and a sense of humor; it is not a scientific method… A

successful life involves both planning and improvising; That is, life brings us opportunities, questions, and problems to solve, and we respond in real time, trying to make sense out of each challenge or offer." (p. - 24)

"PICES MORTUI SOLUM CUM FLUMINE NATANT. ('Only dead fish go with the flow.')" (p. - 25)

"Saying yes (and following through with support) prevents you from committing a cardinal sin -- blocking. Blocking comes in many forms; it is a way of trying to control the situation instead of accepting it. We block when we say no, when we have a better idea, when we change the subject, when we correct the speaker, when we fail to listen, or when we simply ignore the situation; For many of us, the habit is so ingrained that we do not notice that we are doing it." (p. - 29)

"Give up planning. Clear your mind instead of filling it. Don't spend your energy in preparing for the future. Redirect it to the present moment. Instead of packing, show up empty-handed but alert, cheerful, and ready to receive unexpected gifts. Change the habit of getting ready for life in favor of getting on with it now." (p. - 35)

"Instead of preparing an outcome, ready yourself for whatever may come. Open your eyes, breathe fully, and attend to just this moment; Substitute attention for preparation. Then you will be working in real time. Focusing attention on the present puts you in touch with a kind of natural wisdom. When you enter the moment with heightened awareness, what you need to do becomes obvious. You discover that you already have the answers. Each of us is full of the images, words, solutions, advice, stories. Trust your imagination. Trust your mind. Allow yourself to be surprised." (p. - 38 & 39)

"Performance anxiety comes from excessive self-focus. 'Everyone is looking at me. I am not good enough. What if I fail? What will everyone think of me if I make a mistake?' This line of thinking is misguided, anyway. They want you to succeed, to do well. Rarely are you being judged. It is more likely that they are cheering for you and tolerant of mistakes or miscues." (p. - 41 & 42)

"There is no need to find the right starting place. With a big task or a confusing problem, when you don't know where to start, begin with the most obvious thing, whatever is in front of you. The notion that there is such a thing as a proper beginning, and the search to find the ideal starting place robs us of time. We distance ourselves from the task, and the vision of what it will take to do it makes tackling the job seem mountainous." (p. - 53)

"Giving it all you've got commonly backfires. There is a paradox that when we are trying hard the result is often disappointing. A healthier climate is one in which we tell ourselves to just be average. Take the pressure off. Avoid the mind-set that says 'This one better be good!' or 'Be original.' When you try too hard to do your best, the effect on your performance is often to jinx it. In all cases there is something to lose. This can provoke tension and easily lead to anxiety." (p. - 60 & 61)

"Giving up perfection is the first step; the next is to stop trying to come up with something different. Striving for an original idea takes us away from our everyday intelligence, and it can actually block access to the creative process." (p. - 62)

"The most consistent road to unhappiness that I know comes from turning a blind eye to reality; Wishing things were different (or that I was different) simply wastes time. The improviser can't afford unrealistic thinking. Instead, she builds bridges over rocky terrain and turn lemons into lemonade. She works with what is actually in front of her, setting aside the temptation to dwell on what is not." (p. - 78)

"Wishing others would change is another way we avoid facing reality. Other people's behavior often gets on my nerves. I long for them to behave differently. Usually they don't, of course. I need to accept these differences and get on with the show." (p. - 79) Issues Addressed by the Book: Overcoming stress and talking (performing) with confidence are the focus of this book. Eliminating self-defeating attitudes and beliefs, such as procrastination, a need for perfection, and a self-centered focus during conversations are other themes.

Taking action, doing instead of worrying and blocking effective learning are other themes. Acting with spontaneity, making mistakes and moving on, listening in the present and doing whatever seems like it needs doing are other skills that the author suggests. The Book's Shortcomings: The book does not have any shortcomings because the book does not address the situations that many teachers face in the restrictive environments that they work in. If this was a book geared for teachers, this would be a shortcoming. Comments: The author identifies three methods of viewing reality: The critical method: the self is involved

The objective method: the self and others disappear

Seeing situations as a gift: others are involved The author also provides a "what to do" roadmap for improving the delivery of creative instruction, i.e., by providing step-by-step correction of false assumptions (such as the "everyone is looking at me and waiting for me to make a mistake myth") and the suggestion to take action, even if you make mistakes. Mistakes are crucial for the deep learning that a master teacher needs to perfect the craft of teaching.

That teachers work in a bureaucratic environment that is "mistake adverse" Summary: Improv Wisdom is a book that teachers need to apply as part of their daily self-improvement plan.

And, teachers need to model the attitudes, skills, assumptions and techniques for their students. In fact, the "improv" skills that the author describes will serve students more in their lives than any of the test-taking skills that most schools emphasize now.

Speaking and acting in the moment, speaking and thinking creatively, responding in real time to the situation, listening to others and trusting them are skills that build success in any (and every) career or vocation. Sidebart It is easy to believe that a hermit or a politician might not need improv skills to be successful, but this assumption is in error. In fact, the

hermit who depends upon only themselves must live in a constant problem-solving, creative state of mind in order to survive.

In the case of politicians, the skills of listening, answering real questions, speaking from the heart, making mistakes and asking for support would be such "breath-of-fresh-air" qualities that the politician would endear themselves to their constituents. If only the "tow-the-party-line", "spin everything", "promise-the-moon-but-deliver-excuses", "blame the opposition", and "stand for what the polls indicate is popular today" were replaced by honest communication.

Teachers, like politicians, need to learn how to "buck the system" and communicate and act from the core of their authentic selves. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 4

Original - 3

Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.7

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Thursday, November 30, 2006

Book Review

The Excellent 11

Author: Clark, Ron ISBN: 1-4013-01410-X Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 2004 Publisher: NY: Hyperion Pages: 266 Cost: \$19.95 (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$6.99 (new) - \$3.87 (new) at eBay(TM)

Subtitle: Qualities Teachers and Parents Use to Motivate, Inspire and Educate Children The Books' Topics: These are the "Excellent 11" that frame the book's narrative...

Enthusiasm

Adventure

Creativity

Reflection

Balance

Compassion

Confidence

Humor

Common Sense

Appreciation

Resilience The central themes of this book are: Dedicated teachers do whatever it takes to submerge students in learning experiences

Working within the "system" takes time

Teachers need passion to buoy them across a sea of obstacles

Whatever the cost in terms of time, effort and low pay, teaching is worth it Keywords: See the Excellent 11 above

Main Idea: Dedicated teachers work overtime, work more than full time, work day and night for their students.

Passionate teachers "take failure hard and to heart" when even one of their students fails.

Creative teachers can develop unlimited opportunities for expression and activity that further learning experiences for most students.

Unfortunately, many of these "above and beyond the call of duty" take their toll on a teacher's family life, social life or other "free" time; so that a teacher might not have a life at all outside of their classroom-world. Quotes: (Note: There are so many worthwhile quotes in this book that I could be sued for copyright infringement if I posted them all. Instead, the image shows how many quotes I could have picked. Here are a few of the sparkling and polished gems: "...there always seems to be a few students in each class who are impossible to reach. They aren't interested, are usually below grade level, and tend to be discipline problems. Figuring out ways to reach them is an enormous challenge. I found that sometimes I spent so much time trying to reach those few that the rest of the class was suffering. At what point do you abandon the efforts to reach the stubborn few in order to meet the needs of the rest of the class? For me that is always hard, because the more troubled a student seems, the more I want to help." (p. - 15)

"When we are active and truly enthusiastic about our lives and jobs, we are often much happier. When individuals don't enjoy their jobs or aren't pleased with some facet of their life, they tend to have less energy; they gain weight, can't get sound sleep, and experience lethargy. When we engage in activities that we enjoy and have an occupation that excites us, we feel better about ourselves, have greater self-esteem, wake up energized, laugh a lot more, and live longer." (p. - 22)

"Too many students are sitting in classrooms day after day, watching the clock and feeling bored...we must find a way to get these students motivated and excited about something in their lives. We have to place a spark in their hearts and give them something to look forward to." (p. - 23)

"For all children, school should be a safe place. It must offer structure and stability, and teachers must make sure that there is a certain amount of organization and discipline in the daily routine. Once that is established, it is a good idea to throw some spontaneity into the day to keep the kids from getting bored." (p. - 53)

"Taking advantage of "teaching moments" is a quality that all great teachers have. When students show interest or when there is a spark or an eager question that is shared by all, there is no better time to veer off the course and use those teaching moments. When possible, it's always best to connect the new topic to the one you were covering." (p. - 65)

"The best principals put learning and kids' enthusiasm ahead of all else, and they are willing to let down their guard, laugh at themselves, and take on whatever role is necessary to build school morale." (p. - 74)

"In fact, it is a shame how much money teachers are already spending. Each year classroom teachers in the United States spend over one billion dollars of their own money on school supplies." (p. - 87)

"No matter what the subject, showing kids how much they have learned and how far they have come is a great way to build confidence and give them a sense of accomplishment, and the process can actually be an easy one. You can

compare writing samples, math tests, and any number of assessments that will show students how much they have learned."(p. - 105)

"Kids learn differently; some are visual learners, some respond better to things they hear, and others respond to things they experience. Some kids focus best when they are in quite surroundings; others enjoy reading while listening to U2 and watching MTV at the same time. It is important for teachers and parents to present information to students in many different ways so that we are covering all the bases and reaching all the children."(p. - 112)

"Recharging is necessary, and it will make us a better teacher and also a better person. It is important for everyone, not only teachers. On average, American have less time off and fewer vacations that nay nation in the world. We strive for success and focus on output, and oftentimes we sacrifice our health and emotional well-being to meet the needs of the job."(p. - 120)

"The power of the teacher can never be overstated. We have the ability to inspire our students to greatness and truly make them realize their potential. "(p. -159 & 160)

"The number one thing that parents and teachers can do to positively affect the lives of our children and students is to become more aware of the way we speak to them…Children see themselves reflected in our eyes..."(p. - 182)

"Entering the professional is quite challenging, and it is a shame to see so many exceptional teacher leave the profession after teaching only a few years. They enter with so much energy and zest, but they soon burn out…Most new teachers are thrown in without life support."(p. - 191)

"The key to improving education in America isn't more technology, newer schools, bigger libraries, higher test scores, or even lower class size. All those things play a part, but the factor that above all other has the greatest impact on our students is the classroom teacher…unfortunately…teacher pay is not in proportion to the expectations of the job.…As teachers are drained each day mentally, physically, and emotionally, and there cannot be a harder job…it is incredibly difficult. and it is a shame teachers aren't compensated in a way that is equal to the amount of effort that is required."(p. - 209)

"Respect teachers' time. This issue come up most often in discussing teacher meetings. If there is going to be a faculty meeting, the principal must be there on time, there must be a good reason for the meeting, and the principal must not allow the meeting to drag on and on. Thirty minutes is a good amount of time for a faculty meeting after school."(p. - 214)

"Behaviors and attitude tend to trickle down in school systems. If a superintendent is demanding and threatening, the will usually spread to the principals and then to the teachers. The students end up suffering in that environment…The main thing for someone ins such an important position to realize is that they should exhibit the type of characteristics that they would want to see in those working for them."(p. - 228)

"With a supportive principal it is wonderful, but with a principal who seems to be working against you, life can be impossible. How are teachers supposed to follow their own true course and not get fired? How are teachers supposed to try new techniques and methods with a principal who doesn't approve?…These are difficult questions to answer, and I have watched numerous teachers quit and leave the profession, claiming they will never return because of the negative influence of a principal. There were times that I wanted to quit, and the only thing they [sic] kept me from doing so were the students."(p. - 238 & 239)Issues Addressed by the Book:Here are some of the ideas and suggestions presented in this book…How to of planning a stupendous field trip…i.e., out of state, to New York, to Washington D.C., to South Africa!

How to practice reading test skills with students

How to organize and track a system for organizing students' work binder and notebooks

Recommendations for not "shafting" first year teachers with the classes with the worse discipline and assigning first year teacher to endless committees

Tips for mastering the taking of testsThe Book's Shortcomings:The book documents one very passionate and dedicated teacher. But, this is a teacher who doesn't mention his family at all. (Assumption: he is married to his classroom.)

It is not reasonable for a low-paying job (such as teaching) to consume a teacher's life to this extent, no matter how much students benefit.Comments:Ron Clark took students on trips to other states, and even to South Africa. A stupendous effort when, in many school districts, just obtaining permission to leave the county requires a Herculean effort, and where the uphill saga is not worth the personal aging effect upon the teacher.

Ron Clark went so far as to parlay his paycheck at 80% face value with a gangster "loan" officer so that he could purchase awards for his students. He claims that he didn't have money for food for a month. It is difficult imagining a professional teacher living on the hand-to-mouth edge of their personal security so that every dollar was fed back into classroom materials, supplies and motivational rewards.Summary:Ron Clark presents some real how-to strategies and techniques if you are willing to dig through the narrative to find and list them. (Note: Many similar ideas are found on the Classroom Toolkit site.

The difference between the author's philosophy and our philosophy is that teachers should protect themselves, their family time and their identity outside of their teaching job.

Ron Clark seems more like the runner who carried the message from Marathon, exhausted, ready to collapse from giving his all.

Teachers, on the other hand, should be like health conscious walkers, keeping up a steady pace, able to traverse the course well into their "golden years."

In the end, Ron Clark seems like a heavyweight prize fighter, admired, beaten up…but none of us desires to take his place.

Teaching would be a better profession if teachers were taken care of on a par with students. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 3

Applicable - 3

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 4

Original - 4

Interesting - 4

Overall Rating - 3.7

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Tuesday, October 31, 2006

Book Review

Habits of Mind

Author: Fine, Melinda ISBN: 0-7879-0061-3 Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 1995 Publisher: San Francisco: Jossey Bass
Pages: 225 Cost: \$40.00 (List) Available: Amazon ™ at as low as \$40 (new) - \$0.29 (Used) at eBay ™ \$30 (new) and \$5 (used)

Subtitle: Struggling Over Values in America's Classrooms
The Books' Topics: A Confrontive "Tell it like it is" History Curriculum

The Battle for Control of our Schools Moral Curriculum by Liberals and Conservatives

The Evolution of the Moral Dialog in America's Schools
The central themes of this book are: Values are a component of democratic thinking

Our track record on bringing values to light is dim

Divergent visions can coexist in conflict

Students have greater maturity in integrating complex values than many of their elders
Keywords:

Critical Moral Education

Multicultural assumptions

Racial assumptions and attitudes

Political machinations

Political Right (as in direction, not correctness)
Main Idea:

Democratic thought requires full exposure to divergent values

Submerged issues such as race, sex, politics and religion batter our schools

Courage and freedom to communicate bring undercurrents of thought, belief and cloaked action to light.
Quotes:

"While both moral and character education programs have existed in some form or other since the early days of common schooling, multicultural, antiracist, and conflict resolution programs are a more recent phenomena, the products of both the opportunities and tensions born of America's changing demographics and other social, cultural, and political trends. Multicultural curricula seek to sensitize students to the fact of cultural diversity by teaching about the histories and cultures of different ethnic groups. Antiracist curricula take the additional step of investigating the history of unequal power relationships among these groups. They seek to sharpen students' awareness of prejudice and bigotry and strengthen their resolve to act against them. Programs in conflict resolution and violence prevention help students find ways to resolve conflicts peacefully, without resorting to verbal or physical violence." (p. - 7)

"Instilling positive moral values in schoolchildren [sic] sounds good; raising engaged, socially responsible future citizens sounds even better. But these seemingly straightforward goals raise complex questions: What values are to be deemed positive? By whose authority are they promoted? How should they be taught in schools? What is their relation to the schools' many other functions and responsibilities?" (p. -

"I believe that arguing that schools should stick solely to the 'basics' is in fact a dodge. Conservative and New Right critics are not really against schools imparting moral and political values to students; they are simply against imparting values they consider 'wrong.' Their opposition to fostering critical moral thinking stems from their desire to impart their own values to young people--values they implicitly or explicitly claim are authentic, unchanging, and truly 'American.'" (p. - 9)

"The curriculum must provide opportunities for students to explore the practical applications of freedom, which they have learned demand constant struggle with difficult, controversial, and complex issues. The responsibility that citizens have for one another as neighbors and as nations cannot be left to others." (p. - 70)

"From my perspective, these classroom dynamics reveal tensions about conflicting values and ideologies among teachers, students and the Facing History curriculum itself, demonstrating the enormous complexity of the endeavor to catalyze critical, moral thinking among adolescent students." (p. - 70 & 71)

"These issues were fought out in the realm of education is not surprising, and that they took shape in conflicts over a particular curriculum is not without precedent. Over the years, numerous attempts have been made to recon with the place of social and moral values in the classroom. Whether approached as an explicit subject of the curriculum or embedded in the everyday dealings of students and teachers, American schools have long sought to nurture students' ability to know right from wrong, to care about their classmates and caretakers and to treat them with respect, in short to engage with the world by seeing themselves as responsible citizens, members of the human community. These teachings have always been hotly contested, for liberals and conservatives have often been in conflict over the place moral education should occupy within the school curriculum, which values schools should teach, and how they should do so." (p. - 102)

"Opponent of this kind of moral education in the classroom are by no means against responsible citizenship, and many would object to a characterization that pits them against the ideal of cultural tolerance and respect. They are a diverse

group, and their reasons for opposing such curricula are consequently varied. Generally speaking, however, critics argue that moral values are by and large a private affair outside the purview of government. They feel that the responsibility of promoting moral growth lies with the home of the church, not the school. Moreover, they fear that the values promoted within the classroom may at times conflict with those encouraged in the home. Equally invested in advancing a particular understanding of American democracy, they contest the so-called liberal bias of these educational programs and charge that they undermine, rather than further, democratic aims. Fearing the construction of values promoted by liberals within the schools, critics argue against shared responsibility for moral growth. The urge schools to stick to a more limited intellectual terrain instead--for example, the old "basics" of reading, writing and arithmetic. (p. - 103 & 104) Issues Addressed by the Book: This book grapples with the issue of values as these attitudes, habits and beliefs are played out in the culture, religion and politics that impact students, often on a hidden way. The book also conveys a "liberal" bias that weaves a particular spin and slant on history, classroom observation and the emotional impact of the book.

The Book's Shortcomings:

The author tries to be too academic and even handed, and in doing so, weakens the book's documentary value. The author spends lots of time relating intricate observations of students who grapple with these issues, but this style makes scanning for summaries and outlining the book's content cumbersome. It takes detective work to find out what side the author really is on. Comments: This book would benefit from an action oriented, easier to read format. The long narrative passages would be easier to read if outline elements were identified with subheadings and formatting.

A newspaper, rather than literary style, would help busy teachers skim and scan the passages to find relevant passages (and possibly ignore the rest of the endless details). Summary: This is an important topic, and the examples are a bit dated. A conversation about this topic becomes really skewed when the effects of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is seen as a thinly veiled attempt (by some forces) to promote voucher-based funding for religious schools.

Observing and describing student interactions (and confrontations) in exquisite detail, and cataloging the values-in-schools history falls short of providing the action-oriented, easy to read (i.e., scan) and easy to apply materials that busy teachers need. Busy teachers do not have the luxury of sifting through mountains of prose to mine gems of wisdom, no matter how eloquent and insightful. Rating (Four Point scale): Useful - 2

Applicable - 2

Relevant - 3

Innovative - 1

Original - 2

Interesting - 2

Overall Rating - 2.0

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Saturday, September 30, 2006

Book Review

Mapping Inner Space
Author: Margulies, Nancy with Maal, Nusal
ISBN: 1-56976-138-8
Format: Softcover
Pub. Date: 2002
Publisher: Chicago: Zephyr Press
Pages: 159
Cost: \$32.95 (List)
Available: Amazon at as low as \$20.76 (new) - No used copies at eBay
™
Subtitle: Learning and Teaching Visual Mapping
The Books' Topics: Finding and Creating Symbols

Applications of Mind Maps

Mapping with Students

Discovering your Inner Capacities
The central themes of this book are: Everyone engages in some level of visual thought, and Mind Mapping taps this learning resource

Improved results with Mind Maps blossom with practice

Mind Maps assist in developing your inner capacities

Mind mapping techniques can be taught to young children, older children and adults

Effective mapping is a process, and artistic quality maps are not required in order to be used as effective learning and communication tools
Keywords: Knowing and Sensing

Activating Thinking Skills

Learning in Context

Improving Study Skills

Stress and Learning

Mapping and Sharing what we Learn
Main Idea: Visual thought is a foundation of thinking and learning, and Mind Maps can solidify the learning and thinking process.

Mind maps communicate complex relationships and make cognition and constructs concrete and explicit

Learning and knowing can be shared with visual strategies that draw on patterns, symbols and the inner dynamics of thought.

Phases in Mind Mapping Include: Generate the Central Map

Draw a central image and add key words

Associate

Add branches with more ideas. Brainstorm

Review

Check the overall pattern of the map and add new ideas

Incubate

Do something else, then return with a different perspective

Organize

Prioritize and highlight. Regroup ideas

Add symbols, image, arrows and lines to increase meaning and impact

Redraw Map

Redraw the map with the new organization and structure

Quotes: "Before we establish language, we visualize pictures in our minds and link them as concepts. Throughout our lives, the inner knowing that we sometimes call intuition appears as an image or sensation long before we articulate it in words. Unfortunately, we often block the creative channels by training children to write only words, monochromatically, on lined paper. Now that many educators are aware of the value of nurturing thinking skills and creativity, we can employ systems like visual mapping that don't restrict, but rather promote, creative thinking." (p. - 12)

"We now understand that the notion of right and left hemispheres each handling specific task is far too simple to explain the workings of our brains." (p. - 12)

"Most people report that note taking is frustrating, and many have so much trouble reading their own handwriting that they never bother to refer to their notes again." (p.- 18)

"We think we see, but what we usually do is recognize, and then continue looking at what we think we know. This process helps us store data in simplified forms." (p. - 80)

"...Mind Mapping uses key words and does not require the use of phrases, or even a knowledge of grammar. Thus, children who haven't developed writing skills and students for whom English is a second language can use mapping successfully." (p. - 88)

"...one style of thinking is more active when we are writing words on lines because this style deals with words and placing things in order. The other style is more Mind Map--like, using symbols and colorful pictures, and creating new ideas that are not in any special order. Mapping and writing together help us use more of our brain power." (p. -100)

"Our own limiting beliefs often pose a barrier to using our intuition and imagination fully. Most of us do not want to put our faith in our intuitive senses and have trouble accepting credit when our hunches turn out to be accurate." (p. -138)

"The best way to become a skilled visual mapper is to practice. Teaching mapping to others will anchor the learning....Your own capacity to make connections and think creativity will increase, as will your ability to see and record the systems within systems that make up our world." (p. - 152)Issues Addressed by the Book:This book focuses upon the visual aspect of conceptualization, and focuses upon the visual connections associated with learning.

The book also focuses upon methods for teaching the Mind Mapping process to young children, to older children, to business and professional people, and adults. The book demonstrates how the Mind Mapping process is useful for presenters.The Book's Shortcomings:The book models visual communication, and therefore is difficult to "read." Normal speed reading and scanning skills are slow going.

The book presents learning in a (graphical) artistic manner, but does not explore technology solutions for Mind Mapping such as the freeware, Open Source, and commercial products that are available to help us less artistic (and more in a hurry) teachers. (See our article on the free Visual Thought program in this issue of Classroom Toolkit.)

The book could have emphasized that visual learning is dynamic, not static, as the book's Mind Map drawings seem to demonstrate.

The book also fails to mention that the reason that people don't review lecture notes is that they don't have the time. If people don't have the time to scan lecture notes, how will they find the time to work through the notes at least once to re-conceptualize and redraw the concepts on a new map? It is possible that mental rehearsal of the redrawing of concepts would increase learning as much as physically drawing a second or third draft of the notes.

Of course, creating Mind Maps during the planning of a presentation, and sharing the Maps during the presentation will clarify the purpose and the concepts that the presenter wishes to communicate. Still, rather than scanning an elaborate and cluttered Mind Map, a presenter (who will be using electronic slide projection) can streamline the presentation process by creating the Mind Maps with software.

The only drawback of creating Mind Maps by using computer software is the loss of hands-on, tactile, kinesthetic and proprioceptive stimulation that occurs from drawing by hand.Comments:"Reading" this book presents an excellent exercise (and conceptual challenge) for teachers as they peer through a window into how at least one quarter of their students process information (visually).

The book's conceptualization could have been strengthened by mentioning that internal images contain sound, smell, taste, sensations, feelings, self-talk and words; not just visual images.

The author's ideas also would be stronger if she explained that a static drawing represents a minor subset of the rich, dynamic and multisensory internal pictures that many people think with.Summary: This is a book that is meant to be perused and explored, not studied and memorized. Look for inspiration and insight, not information. Use the examples and create maps of your own.Rating (Four Point scale):Useful - 4Applicable - 4Relevant - 3Innovative - 4Original - 3Interesting - 3_____Overall Rating - 3.5

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Thursday, August 31, 2006

Book Review

Doomed to Fail: Subtitle: The Built-In Defects of American Education Author: Zoch, Paul A. ISBN: 1-56663-567-5 Format: Hardcover Pub. Date: 2004 Publisher: Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Pages: 237 pages Cost: \$26.95 (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$6.05 (new) - \$12.58 at eBay(TM) How can the most expensive-to-operate school system in the world achieve success results that are eclipsed by other nations?

Either the other countries have smarter students, better teachers, wiser leaders and more streamlined bureaucracies; or, there is something wrong with American education.

What's going on? Let's look at the possibilities...

Students in one country are just as smart (or dumb) as students in another country. The distribution of intelligence seems to follow a normal distribution

Actually, the United States has better teachers who work harder and do more; teaching about 120% more hours per day than teachers in other industrialized countries

Leadership skills for U.S. district administrators also seem to follow a normal distribution, although, there is a drain of competent leaders from U.S. schools to higher paying professions; whereas; in other industrialized countries, teachers are paid well

Bureaucracies are bureaucracies, i.e., inept in most areas of operation except the generation of paperwork and red tape. Bureaucracies tend to force creativity, self-expression, excellence and achievement toward the mean, i.e., mediocrity Since "There must be something wrong with U.S. education" is the only one of "causal culprits" left standing, this hypothesis therefore is proved!

Actually, it should be easy to tell that something is amiss in U.S. education because there is a "teacher shortage", due to the fact that so many teachers leave the profession within the first three years.

If as many firefighter recruits left the force, our cities would be smoldering cinders and smoking ash. If as many recruits left the police force, crime would be rampant in the streets. Hmm?

Actually, certain crimes (such as participation in the drug and sex trades) may be rampant in the neighborhoods surrounding the lowest performing schools. But, correlation does not prove a "cause and effect" relationship.

The Books' Topics: Progressive Educational Thinking

The Cult of the Child

Education after Behaviorism

Pedagogue-Centric Education: The Omnipotent/ Incompetent Teacher

The Irrelevant Student

"Textbook Garbage."

Where Education Succeeds: The Absence of the Progressive Paradigm in Japan The central themes of this book are:

Faulty assumptions about what education is and how important teachers are to students' learning causes teachers to be mistakenly blamed for failures in the American educational system

Fixing our educational system means changing the role of the teacher to something that is realistic, and making students responsible for their own learning

The history of how U.S. educators came to believe in the failed notions about what constitutes quality instruction is important in devising a cure

U.S. Education will continue to lag behind other developed nations until students are required to work harder and develop the self-discipline that is required for achievement

Keywords:

Progressive Paradigm

Behaviorism and Individualism

Cult of the Child

Pedagogue-Centric Education

Textbook Garbage

Main Idea: U.S. education would improve if students (instead of their teachers) were accountable for their own learning success

The Japanese Model of education produces better results because students and their parents are driven to excel.

A national curriculum and a national system of testing could reverse the downward slide in instructional success, a slide that cannot be stopped by just throwing more money at the problem.

Quotes: "There is no shortage of comment from intelligent and not so intelligent people arguing that better, smarter teachers will produce better, smarter students, and that culpability for the low levels of academic achievement among our teachers undoubtedly lies with our teachers." (p. - x)

"This grossly simplistic and mechanistic view of learning; that teachers determine whether or not students

learn—is quite simply, wrong." (p. - xi)

"In a way, Parker [Col. Francis W. Parker] created the mold for the modern superintendent—highly paid (despite his less than stellar educational background) and imperious to his often better-educated subordinates in the classroom, all the while professing a great love for children—but from a safe distance." (p. - 79)

"...By one current, behaviorism, the teacher's responsibility is to provide the appropriate stimulus that will elicit from each student the desired response; the student is seen in a relatively passive and helpless role, his action determined by the demands of the environment and the stimuli provided by the teacher, who is all-powerful because of his training in pedagogical science. By another current, based on the theories of Dewey and Kilpatrick, students are expected to learn only what they feel a need to learn. Because compelling students to learn something they feel no need for might inflict on them grave psychological damage, all subject must be learned in a natural way, through normal interactions and relations with one's environment, society, and peers, in the absence of compulsion, strain, and formal lessons on academic subjects." (p. - 148 & 149)

"Teachers, after all, are trained professionals in pedagogy, a scientific discipline, with the power—if they try hard enough, if they care enough, if they are not cynical, burned-out, public functionaries, protected in their incompetence by the teachers' unions, and if they will merely implement the latest pedagogical techniques devised by the experts in the colleges of education, acting as impartial, scientific rigor—to make learning natural and easy, even fun for students." (p. - 149)

"It is time for Americans to consider the possibility that the problem of underachievement in the nation's public schools does not stem from the teachers and how they teach, but rather from elements of the Progressive Paradigm that make widespread academic excellence virtually impossible to achieve. It is time to consider the possibility that the chief beneficiaries of this pedagogue-centric educational philosophy are not the students but only the colleges of education and the people in them who promote the Progressive Paradigm " (p. - 150)

"Let there be no doubt about it: the United States looks to its teachers and their efforts, but not to its students and their efforts, for success in education. That being the accepted wisdom, students are free to do nothing more than wait for the teacher to create success for them. Educational reform literature rarely contains the thought that our students are failing primarily because they do not study enough." (p. - 150)

"...Many students in the United States frequently fail to learn even when they have a good teacher, one reason being that they are not expected to engage in the struggle that is sometimes—even often—necessary for gaining knowledge, and therefore don't strive for understanding." (p. - 153)

"It is an ugly and disgraceful fact that the current system of letter grades, in the absence of an absolute, objective standard, is grossly unfair...The current system of letter grades penalizes students who choose difficult courses with demanding teachers, for such students are more likely to earn lower grades than students who choose electives taught by "cool" teachers who don't expect their students to sweat and struggle to meet high standards...The current system, because of the "Lake Wobegon Effect" (the term that describes how most students in U.S. schools are above average), also gives mediocre students good grades they don't deserve, and thus a false sense of competence "(p. - 199 - 200)

"...the letter grade system penalizes demanding teachers, for teachers who have high expectations for their students and insist that they work hard for good grades when students in Mr. So-and-so's class have such an easy time--they all get A's and never have to study! The tough teachers in American schools must often waste an inordinate amount of time and energy defending their adherence to high standards; eventually, many simply lose their idealism and give up, having grown weary of incessant complaints from students, parents, and even administrators."(p. - 200)

"Students must understand that going to school is their job, something that most do not now realize. Many students, thinking that it is the teachers job to do what will "make" them smart, feel little need to take their classes seriously."; (p. - 200)

"The knee-jerk tendency in the United States is to charge teachers with incompetence for any perceived failure of their students or their schools. Considering what teachers are expected to do—make students smart without causing them stress, and make their time at school a joyful, emotionally fulfilling experience—teachers cannot but fail and thus incur society's contempt. Placing responsibility for learning on the students, and expecting teachers only to present competent lessons..., might retain many of the large percentage of teachers who leave within the first three years, and might reduce the burnout factor among veterans." (p. - 201)

Issues Addressed by the Book: U.S. students (and their parents) expect that their teachers will motivate them, entertain them, devise novel methods to communicate information and instill knowledge...while the students remain in a passive learning mode.

Descriptions of the Japanese method of education are so "out of sync" to American culture that almost no one would suggest that such a stressful method be adopted in the U.S. (Although the odious testing required by the No Child Left Behind Act is a baby step in this direction. The Book's Shortcomings:

The book is meticulously academic, and few teachers have time to read such a long book, cover to cover. The writing style uses long sentences with qualifiers, but teachers need quick, scannable text.

The history of how U.S. education became mired "in the state that it is in" is important, because "what caused the mess" is important in arriving at a solution to the real problem. However, working-day-and-night teachers need a resource that easily maps to action plans and how-to checklists. That is why Chapter 8, "What is to Be Done?" Pages 196 to 202, are the most important part of the book.

Teachers can always read about the history, later.

Comments:It is easy to assume that the teacher shortage is due to the relatively low pay and long hours that teachers face.It is also easy to point the finger at the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) to find a major source of the inordinate stress that teachers and students are experiencing as the law warps sound instructional design, values and ideals.But, it is harder to recognize the basic social assumptions that underpin our schools' culture of failure.

The comparisons with Japanese and Asian educational systems, while fascinating, do not provide workable, doable maps of what to change in U.S. education. The attitudes and assumptions needed to adopt a Japanese-model educational system as so different from what Americans value that believing that such a system would work here creates a level of "cognitive dissonance."

It might almost be easier to get Americans to adopt an "Eskimo diet" of raw seal blubber than to implement the Japanese educational model in the U.S.Summary:Doomed to Fail offers lots of insights and lots of eloquent passages that paint elegant pictures detailing the reasons that our schools continue to under deliver for our students.

And, Doomed to Fail explains the reasons why our current reform efforts can only fail because they are based upon false assumptions.The language of the book is so well crafted that it would have been easy to provide double or triple the number of quotes in this review. This is an excellent book.

Rating (Four Point scale):

Useful - 4Applicable - 4Relevant - 4Innovative - 3Original - 3Interesting - 3_____Overall Rating - 3.5

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Monday, July 31, 2006

Book Review

Staying Well with Guided Imagery

Author: Naparstek, Belleruth ISBN: 0-446-51821-2 Format: Hard cover Pub. Date: 1994 Publisher: NY: Warner Books Pages: 228 Cost: \$19.95 (List) Available: Amazon & eBay; at as low as \$11.16 (new) \$5.16 (used) - \$5.28 at eBay & eBay;

Subtitle:

How to Harness the Power of Your Imagination for Health and Healing The Books' Topics:

How and Why Imagery Works

Different Kinds of Imagery

Imagery for Health

Imagery for Emotional Resiliency

Imagery Exercises for Common Complaints

The central themes of this book are:

The healing response to imagery is innate and powerful

Imagery improves health, learning and performance

Imagery methods are adaptable using taped scripts, music, and suggestion

Imagery is a natural skill of the unconscious mind

Creative imagery methods work for just about everybody

Keywords:

Imagery

Altered State of Consciousness

Relaxation and Reverie

Scripts

Main Idea: The use of Guided Imagery and the production of Guided Imagery recordings is a scientific method for helping people heal themselves better and faster.

These guided imagery methods also work for self-improvements in emotional response, attitude and performance.

The altered state that the daydream-like guided imagery elicits is beneficial for healing, learning and changing habits.

Practice with imagery techniques produces greater skill and accelerated (sometimes amazing) results.

Quotes: Note: Bold text reflects font weight in the original.

"...most people make the mistake of thinking that imagery means something strictly visual...When I refer to imagery, I'm talking about any perception that comes through any of the senses." (p. - 17)

"These sensory images are the true language of the body, the only language it understands immediately and without question. To the body, these images can be almost as real as actual events...Our bodies don't discriminate between sensory images in the mind and what we call reality." (p. - 17 & 18)

"In the altered state, we are capable of more rapid and intense healing, growth, learning, and change." (p. - 22 & 23)

"By altered state, I mean a state of relaxed focus, a kind of calm but energized alertness, a focused reverie. Attention is concentrated on one thing, or on a very narrow band of things. As this happens, we find that we have increased sensitivity to what we are focused on, and a decreased awareness of the other things that are going on around us, things that we would ordinarily notice." (p. - 23)

"We are in and out of altered states all day long. Sometimes it's just for a matter of seconds." (p. - 23)

"We feel better about ourselves when we have a sense of mastery over what is happening to us. Conversely, a sense of helplessness lowers self-esteem, not to mention our ability to cope and our hopefulness about the future." (p. - 26)

"Skill at using imagery increases with practice...The more you use imagery, the more your response to it deepens, intensifies, and becomes controllable. So don't make limiting assumptions about your capacity. It will grow exponentially." (p. - 28 & 29)

"Imagery works best in a permissive, unforced atmosphere. It is a gentle, amorphous, right-brain activity that thrives on a soft, receptive state of mind. Commanding, scolding, or threatening yourself will not only not work but will probably defeat your purpose." (p. - 31)

"Nor do old notions of 'paying attention' apply here. This is the sort of experience where it is normal to fade in and out.

So don't expect the kind of rigorous, alert attentiveness that you invoked to, say, study for exams. That was using the left side of your brain. This is your right side. The right brain is dreamy, nonlogical, and laid-back." (p. -32)

"It is certainly true that words are much more confining and limiting than images by themselves. The minute we try to cram what we perceive into the artificial constraints of language, we have already tampered with the truth and limited it

to some degree." (p. -36)

"Being in a relaxed, focused, altered state; using all of your senses for your imagery, and especially the feeling sense in the body; continued practice; going to the same place with the same props each time, at least initially; the same initial beginning rituals, such as taking two or three deep breaths; using music for background; the accompanying use of touch, such as putting your hands over your belly as you breathe; a permissive, unforced atmosphere; using images that feel right to you, as opposed to imposing an external ideas of "correctness" onto yourself; not trying too hard, and a willingness to stop for the moment if you think you are..."(p. -199)

"We all need to daydream spontaneously. This helps us solve problems, get in touch with deeper parts of ourselves, and take some much needed 'vacation' time from everyday reality." (p. - 199)

"...Children are naturals at using imagery. They respond to it very easily and very intensely, because they haven't had time to be acculturated away from this natural ability." (p. - 207)

"...imagery is bad for you when you use it to avoid taking responsibility for your life. The imagination is a fabulous gift and an amazing tool. It enriches our lives and extends our capacity for all manner of things. But it should never seduce us away from taking care of ourselves in normal, waking reality." (p. - 216)

Issues Addressed by the Book: The author focuses upon uses of imagery with serious health issues, i.e., cancer, cardiovascular issues, depression, grief and loss, and immune system malfunction. The author also focuses upon lesser issues such as headache, pain, allergies, insomnia and fatigue; issues that many teachers experience as a result of the stress of their jobs.

Teachers can also learn a great deal by modeling how these scripts give instructions and orders to students. The scripts give suggestions and imply benefits, they do not give orders.

Teachers should avoid giving orders that students don't already want to do, and teachers should avoid engaging in power struggles with students.

The use of recorded imagery scripts in a classroom setting provides the additional benefit of improving behavior, memory and performance. Due to the tendency of human nature for people to improve whenever they feel like that are being treated in a special way, teachers can communicate that students who hear these recordings are special. This pattern of improving in response to receiving special attention is commonly known as the "Hawthorne Effect."

The Book's Shortcomings: The book focuses upon clinical and extreme health issues for many of its pages. This makes the book less suitable for classroom teachers.

But, the book was written for clinicians, and for members of the general public who are beset with health issues.

The book also weaves instructions between pages instead of listing or directly addressing controversial ideas.

For example, the book weaves the belief in the existence of a "soul" into some of the scripts. This is a topic that most teachers in public schools would not dare to broach. In fact, many parochial schools might not support the personal, intuitive, self-directed spiritual communication that the author suggests because their specific, institutionalized dogma trumps personal experience of the ineffable.

Comments: Imagery is a tool that all teachers can use every day. The costs are small, especially if imagery scripts are read from a notebook. The script can be recorded once, and replayed many times. These recordings can also be used in a learning center.

More importantly, students can learn to integrate imagery with other learning skills and acquire a life-long benefit.

The author presents an accurate summary of the practical methods for using guided imagery in a nineteen page FAQ section at the back of the book. This is worth reading carefully. Other than that, the scripts in this book are a resource for a teacher who wants to integrate imagery procedures into classroom instruction.

The individual scripts are examples that were tested with a lot of patients afflicted with specific conditions. But, teachers can adapt the patterns as appropriate for their classes.

Summary: This, or a book like it is important for teachers because the linear, cognitive information spooning of teacher-delivered lecture material to students is marginally effective.

In addition, imagery is a tool that teachers can use to decrease their own stress, and to increase their recovery from late hours of mental exertion (a typical job hazard).

And, understanding the creative process involved in using "altered states" has connections to use for other strategies recommended by Classroom Toolkit.

These are:

Daily Inspirational Messages

See our newsletter article: [Link to the article...](#)

The Mutual Storytelling Technique

See our newsletter article: [Link to the article...](#)

Helping students cope with the stress of high-stakes tests

See our newsletter article concerning a saliva stress test and our recommendation [Link to the article...](#)

You didn't think that we were going to let the NCLB Law off the hook, did you? The NCLB Act is a major perpetrator (or as they say on the police shows, "Perp" of of stress in our schools.

Rating (Four Point scale):

Useful - 4

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4
Innovative - 3
Original - 3
Interesting - 3

Overall Rating - 3.5

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Friday, June 30, 2006

Book Review

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The Simplicity Survival Handbook: 32 Ways to Do Less and Accomplish More

Author: Jensen, Bill
ISBN: 0-7382-0912-0
Format: Softcover
Pub. Date: 2003
Publisher: NY: Basic Books
Pages: 311
Cost: \$17.95 (List)
Available: Amazon at as low as \$11.67 (new) - \$3.99 at eBay(TM)

Subtitle:

Do less...of the corporate silliness. Ignore more of the noise and senseless stuff that comes your way. You deserve better. You deserve to spend your time and talent on what truly matters.

The Books' Topics:

Stop the senseless stuff that comes your way each day

You don't have to remain a victim of the system nonsense, and you don't have to perpetuate that silliness either

You have more control over your workload than you believe

You can do something about "the system" without losing your job

The central themes of this book are:

Protect yourself, save time and see the humor in the stupidity that you experience at work

Change the conversation about leadership, communication, productivity workflow, efficiency and other system-twisted "motivators"

Keywords:

System Silliness

Supposed-to Stupidness

Corporate Claptrap

The Productivity of Doing Less

Main Idea:

Doing less is smart, productive and professional.

Vegetating in the minefield of and mindless tasks and "black hole" politics of the system is less fulfilling and leaves a bad taste in your mouth.

Navigating through this morass can be fun if you know what to expect, and if you learn the Simplicity Survival Judo that uses the clumsy inertia of the bureaucracy to trip your bosses and coworkers under their own weight.

Quotes:

"Ask "Why?" three to five times before agreeing to do stuff." (p. - 87)

"Three ways to deal with bosses who don't get it

Smile and Nod

Go Around or Above

Let Your Departure Do the Talking" (p. - 94)

"One of the primary drivers in day-to-day activities is to keep things moving forward. Most of us avoid anything that smacks of moving backwards -- like stopping to reflect on, and question, any work that has already been set in motion. That doesn't make us bad people. Or bad managers or bad teammates. Just crazed and overloaded." (p. - 148)

"The idea is pretty simple: give people all the information they need so they can manage themselves, and make decisions that ought to be part of their job. But leveraging transparency in ways that leaders can trust all this new

openness and self-management-- well, yeah, that can get a little complicated." (p. - 240)

Issues Addressed by the Book:

This book addresses the issues that develop from any bureaucracy or chain-of-command hierarchy. However, Mr. Jensen has figured out that the power of these organizations needs to reside at the worker (or teacher) level if they are to survive and thrive in the Information Age.

The Book's Shortcomings:

This book didn't have any shortcomings. It is the first book that we have reviewed to receive a perfect score.

However, many teachers may not have the options of getting up and leaving when confronted with an archaic and backwards work environment.

For many teachers, the local school district where they work is the only game in town (or in many towns around). For these teachers, some procedures that are less assertive than "voting with their feet" may be most appropriate.

Comments:

Some of the strategies and solutions to real-world issues presented by corporate knowledge workers may not apply to teachers.

And, the grass may not be greener in the next school district, either.

Finding a vibrant work environment where creativity, productivity, and worker empowerment is the rule is almost "ruled out."

Summary:An original and creative work that is worth exploring and worth applying, especially for anyone that works for a large, bureaucratic organization.

Rating (Four Point Scale):

Applicable - 4

Relevant - 4

Innovative - 4

Original - 4

Interesting - 4

Overall Rating - 4.0

Wednesday, May 31, 2006

Book Review

Work 2.0: Rewriting the Contract

Author: Jensen, Bill ISBN: 0-7382-0569-9 Format: Hard Cover Pub. Date: 2002

Publisher: Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishers Pages: 194 Cost: \$25.00 (List) Available: Amazon at as low as \$0.50 (new paperback) \$0.03 (used paperback, shipping \$3.99 at eBay(TM))

(Note: if you are short of cash, wait until our review next month, and buy another book by Bill Jensen. This review tells you everything a teacher needs to know about this new concept of work.) Subtitle:

Rewriting the Contract

This book really is about how information the economy is different from the Industrial Age economy, and how talent is an organization's most valuable asset.

The Books' Topics:

Finding and retaining talented workers is the most important aspect of an Information Economy

Information workers need to be supported in the creative and individual expression of their talents

People need to interact, find inspiration, motivate each other, and collaborate...and these relationships should not be restricted to a company or organization. Collaboration should be world wide

Leadership means supporting and nurturing talent, trusting people and allowing for wildly better results than were first anticipated

The central themes of this book are:

No one needs companies to help them collaborate in our information society

Talented workers won't stay on a job that restricts their output, or their expression

It is difficult (or impossible) for talented employees to accomplish organizational goals with a top-down structure

Leadership (and supporting talented workers) means delivering what workers need, now; and in creating easy solutions for that worker to use on the job

Keywords:

Invisible Workplace

Asset Revolution

Peer-to-Peer Value

Extreme Leadership

Main Idea:

The old-style, top-down, chain-of-command management of bureaucracy is ineffective and obsolete

Talented employees are the most valuable asset of any organization, and collaborating employees leverage (multiply) that value still further

Leadership and management is about trust, and about understanding that meddling with the talents and creativity of employees is always detrimental to the positive outcomes and beneficial results that the organization needs.

Management support means getting out of the way of these talented employees, and letting them express their abilities.

Quotes:

"The biggest shift in the next few years will be how leaders lead."(p. - 46)

"Your company may serve a critical marketplace or customer need. But nobody needs companies anymore to help them collaborate, share, or create. People can now self-organize amazingly well, thank you. Their daily challenge is to get the most out of each connection, often in the least amount of time."(p. - 47)

"If I'm not working on something that is incredibly challenging and incredibly important, I'm not going to be there...My Work My Way includes the way we need to work in order to meet the team's goals. Nonnegotiable are the best tools, total flexibility about how to achieve results, and completely open information sharing."(p. - 51)

"Extreme leaders constantly ask, "Am I doing enough to demonstrate that I respect and trust the people around me? Am I changing enough?"(p. - 120)

"Extreme leaders constantly ask, "How far will we go to ensure that employees can control their own destiny?"(p. - 120)

"...freedom and autonomy ranked equal to, or higher than, compensation in job-interview questions...in order to attract and retain key talent in highest demand, companies will need to create more opportunities to affect company decisions,

build businesses, and share in wealth creation."(p. - 184)

Issues Addressed by the Book:

This book addresses the issue of employee's autonomy and creativity. This concept is important to teachers in two ways:

Politicians and school administrators need to understand that teachers are the most valuable asset of a school (and district), and need to understand that support for autonomy and just-in-time delivery of materials, supplies and resources are the leader's main job

Teachers should be telling their leaders what they need, and leaders performance should be gauged by how well the employee's needs are fulfilled.

Students have the same talent and value as workers. It is the teacher's job to listen to students and to deliver what students need to create, collaborate and produce.

Teacher who demand that school leaders deliver what they need should provide a similar level of support to their students.

The Book's Shortcomings:

This book's style is a bit boring and objective. The book presents information and ideas, rather than a compelling story.

Comments:

The ideas that are presented in this book are valuable for teachers on two levels:

For teachers' contribution as talented knowledge workers

For teachers' "Extreme Leadership" with students

The author's belief that "trust is central" is precisely right-on.

Politicians and school administrators must trust teachers, and teachers must trust students.

The impulse toward mastery and achievement is innate in all people...a force that traditional, factory-oriented schools have been targeted for elimination.

Supporting and nurturing creative minds is required for a society to remain competitive in the global, information economy.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00

Sunday, April 30, 2006

Book Review

The Little Book of Coaching: Motivating People to be Winners

Author: Blanchard, Ken and Shula, Don

ISBN: 0-06-662103-8

Format: Hardcover

Pub. Date: 1996

Publisher: NY: Harper Business

Pages: 117

Cost: \$17.95 (List)

Available: Amazon at as low as \$11.67 (new) Used from \$3.25 eBay(TM) no current bargains, but check firstThe Books'

Topics:

This is a motivational book. You can consider teachers to be motivators of their students, and you can substitute the word "Teacher" for "Coach" through most of the book.

The central themes of this book are:

Coaches have to walk the talk before they have the authority to motivate
Honesty and integrity are for a coach to loose, and regaining trust takes a long time

Building attitudes for winning can help people in every profession.

Keywords:

Conviction-Driven: Never compromise your beliefs

Overlearning: Practice until it's perfect

Audible-Ready: Know when to Change

Consistency: Respond predictably to performance

Honesty-Based: Walk your talk

(p. - 7)

Main Idea:

Tough, street-wise students will over run a teacher that is not prepared.

However, the teacher that is prepared can do the job with a minimal skill set, and very basic tools.

Quotes:

"What do you stand for?...What is the main message you broadcast to people based upon your daily actions and words?"

Remember, if you don't stand for something,
you'll fall for anything."

(p. - 9)

"Beliefs are what make things happen. Beliefs come true. Inadequate beliefs are setups for inadequate performance. And it's the coach's --the leader's--beliefs that are most important, because they are self-fulfilling."

(p. - 13)

"It sounds trite, but one of the marks of real success in life is to believe that there's a reason for everything. We can't control every event, but we can control our response to it. Life is unpredictable. What makes a winner is that when something happens, that person's brings forth attitudes that can take good events and make them better; likewise it transforms bad events into opportunities to learn."

(p. - 27)

"...Remember, there is no easy walk to excellence. You and your team have to train so hard that you are almost perfect on the day of the game. The best of the best know that there is no such thing as a shortcut. All great results are built on the foundation of practice and preparation."

(P. - 33)

"I ask people all the time, 'Given the amount of time you spend at work, would you rather spend that time being magnificent or ordinary.' 'What do you think they say?' They shout out, 'Magnificent!' And yet, are most of the people in organizations performing magnificently? Of course not. And a key reason is the self-fulfilling prophesy that starts in leaders', managers', coaches', and parents' heads, what the belief that most people are lazy, unreliable, and irresponsible. This belief plays out in how they treat people, and ultimately how these people perform."

(p. - 41)

"...setting goals is important, but most organizations overemphasize this process and don't pay enough attention to what needs to be done to achieve the goals. More important than setting the goals is the follow-up--attention to detail, demand for practice perfection, and all the things that separate things that separate teams that win from those that don't."

(p. - 43)

"Many people are struggling right now because they haven't learned the power of flexibility. They are still living in the past. They are scared to move forward. You know why? Because they don't have the confidence to do so. They are afraid of failure. They are fearful of looking stupid. They doubt themselves. They are stuck in a rut."

(p. - 53)

"There are four consequences or responses people can receive after they perform or do something. The most common response people get for their performance is no response. They do something and no one says anything. The next most common response is negative--they get zapped. As a result, many managers are seen as 'seagull managers.' They are not around until something goes wrong and then they fly in, make a lot of noise, dump on people, and then fly out. Not a very helpful way to be managed.

The last two responses--redirection and positive--are the least used and most effective. When someone does something wrong, redirection focuses his or her energy back on what the original goal was. A positive consequence is welcome when a person does something right or makes progress."

(p. - 69)

"Perhaps today's leaders are too focused upon what's urgent to take time for what is important."

(p. - 77)

"Redirecting is the way to correct a mistake when an individual or team has not learned to do what you want them to do. If people make mistakes while they are learning and you yell at them or punish them, you'll only increase their anxiety and motivate them to avoid the punisher--you."

(p. - 79)

"We promise you that you can only be your best when you are entirely authentic. That means you're not trying to be anybody else. You are being your own true character. You are being honest, not just with other people, but with yourself as well."

(P. - 85)

"A lot of leaders want to tell people what to do, but they don't provide the example. 'Do as I say, not as I do,' doesn't cut it when leading people to a destination of success."

(p. - 91)

Issues Addressed by the Book:

This book addresses the attitude and motivation that all teachers need to internalize and actualize.

Basics that are explored include:

The attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of a record holding professional football coach.

The Book's Shortcomings:

The authors assume that everyone wants to contribute the best of themselves and do whatever it takes to actualize unqualified success in their lives.

The book is long on motivation and a philosophy of success, but does not offer a roadmap of how we turn our character into this kind of competitive personality.

Also, the book assumes that everyone wants to compete and win.

But, some people want to share, teach, heal, inspire, and love.

Others want to create music, dance, poetry, song and literary works...and their passion is not to lead others, but to actualize only the best from within themselves.

Some people want to cooperate on a team, others find that a team

limits their contributions because their gifts are individual, unique and exquisite. For these people, the rule of being authentically themselves overrides the rule about teamwork because the team "waters down" their contributions.

Comments:

Easy to read book. However, the full price seems steep for the amount of information that is contained in the book.

Coaching a professional football team would be like teaching a class with students who all had IQs of over

150...students who were paid thousands of dollars an hour to study.

If professional football players have to be motivated despite their talent and high pay, how much more motivation would ordinary students require?

Friday, March 31, 2006

Book Review

New Location for this book review, Teaching and the Art of Successful Classroom Management
<http://newsletter.classroomtoolkit.com/67/teaching-and-the-art-of-successful-classroom-management/>

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Book Review at 05:00