

## Book Reviews

Continued from page 3.

**By Joshua Higgins  
Hofstra Graduate Student  
Long Island, NY**

**Transformed: How Everyday  
Things Are Made**  
**Bill Slavin**  
**Kids Can Press, 2005**

This wonderful book is a goldmine for the ever-curious and always-inquisitive. Written for grades 3-7, and intriguing for all ages, *Transformed* is a lively look at how 69 different everyday items are created. Discover how everything from soccer balls to CDs, pencils to plastic wrap, and jelly beans to fortune cookies are made and packaged for our use. Each item is accompanied by a step-by-step process description, historical information, and whimsical illustrations that make this book both interesting and fun.

**Discover the Stars**  
**Cynthia Pratt Nicolson**  
**Illustrated by Bill Slavin**  
**Kids Can Press, 2006**

Another entry in the "Kids Can Read" series, *Discover the Stars* is an engaging look at stars, galaxies, constellations, and telescopes for children in Grades 1-3. Full of lively illustrations and stunning color photographs, this fascinating fact book is perfect for little astronomers learning to read on their own.

**Sing, Nightingale, Sing!**  
**Francoise de Guibert**  
**Illustrated by Chiaki Miyamoto**  
**Music by Daniel Goyone**  
**Kane/Miller Book Publishers, 2006**

A unique introduction to birds of the world, this guide has information on 61 different birds categorized by habitat, such as garden, forest, pond, etc. Each entry includes a colorful illustration, as well as physical and behavioral descriptions. Meant for ages 5-9, *Sing, Nightingale, Sing!* serves as a good starting point for young bird lovers. An especially nice touch is the accompanying CD, which includes the bird calls of 50 different species, as well as 13 lovely piano and bird song duets.

## Good Books

**By Emilia Osborne**  
**Winding Creek Elementary School**  
**Stafford, Virginia**

**Mommy, Carry Me Please**  
**Holiday House, 2006**

This is a delightful primary book that gives the reader the opportunity to discuss different families and their ways of caring for their young. The author cleverly uses the different ways animals carry their young.

**Scaredy Squirrel by Melanie Watt**  
**Kids Can Press Ltd.**  
**Tonawanda, NY, 2006**

Scaredy Squirrel never leaves his tree because it may be too dangerous out there. This is a great book that discusses fears and how to overcome them. The book also discusses schedules and how to they are used. This is a wonderful book to read and to use for writing.

**ASCD Conference** Continued from cover page.

We now have the opportunity to describe with some precision the individual neurodevelopmental profiles of all students and respond to the present and future implications of these evolving profiles.

We now have the opportunity to educate regular classroom teachers to become the lead neurodevelopmental observers of students, serving as the community's practicing developmentalists. (especially with regard to the age group and/or content they teach).

We now have the opportunity to cultivate educators as classroom phenomenologists, who are keenly aware of the reality that most of the most vital thought processes and learning pathways are not on any test and can never be reflected in any set of standardized tests scores.

We now have the opportunity to launch a new humanistic/scientific era in education, one that focuses specifically on the growth of individual minds based on what we are learning about the developing brain and the learning processes and fortified by an unwavering commitment to neurodevelopmental pluralism!"



# Spotlight on LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND LITERATURE

A Newsletter of the ASCD Network

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## Facilitator's Message

**Lenore Sandel, Ed.D.**  
**Professor Emerita**  
**Hofstra University**

This newsletter reaches Network members as the classrooms are cleared for summer recess and administrators' offices are readying files for the influx of end-of-year reports. For some, summer means complete change of pace, activity, responsibility and choice. For others, the pattern may vary, but responsibility remains a continuing concern.

The large population of Katrina victims, and others affected by natural disasters, are facing minimal, if any, "recess." They are to use time to try to "catch up" on study and assessment. If we can help in any way to support the effort and the rebuilding and replenishing energies, this Network will respond to the call. Several cartons of books have been sent to one school in Louisiana. The principal described how she hosted teachers from other schools for their own self-selection. If any Network member knows of a specific need, please contact me at the address below.

The customary bibliography of recent professional publications and children's books will be sent later for your reference, when your interests and needs will be at a higher peak in anticipation of the new school year.

The assessment results, which determine placement on the NCLB scales, are expected – for many with trepidation. The measures of achievement are, at this writing, linked to school standing, and consequent support from the federal government.

To each of you teachers and administrators, I urge you to commend yourself for the strength of learning you have given to each of your students. It is your teaching that has sparked intellectual curiosity, your guidance that has channeled interests and talents and sense of wonder. The assessment grading in numbers or descriptive levels will be an administrative reality. The intangibles of a teacher's caring ways to learning cannot be described in standardized terms.

Hopefully for you and for each student, it has been a good year – and with every young learner, in the words of Tracy Kidder, we have not "run out of time."

Enjoy the summer – look for the beauty of the sunrise and the calm of the sunset – and always, the hope of the rainbow.

*Lenore Sandel, Ed.D.*

## ASCD Annual Conference

**By Esther Fusco, Ph.D.**

Dr. Mel Levine was one of the keynote speakers at the Annual Conference in Chicago. He is professor of pediatrics at University of North Carolina Medical School and the author of many books, including *Educational Care* (Educator Publishing Service, 2002). His presentation was "What we are learning about learning: Implications for what we should be reaching in teaching." It was just outstanding because he presented new hope for teaching our students who have learning disorders.

Dr. Levine shared many points with us in an informative handout. Here are a few. "We now have the opportunity to identify – and even localize – the essential brain processes and neurodevelopmental functions that must be activated in a student for optimal learning and productivity to be realized.

We now have the opportunity to examine the neurodevelopmental content and demands of contemporary adult careers, so as to align

education with currently called for forms of mind preparation, while fostering work life readiness.

We now have the opportunity to minimize our stress on neurodevelopmental functions that may potentiate success in school but are unlikely to harbor relevance for fulfillment in the adult world.

We now have the opportunity to track and affect the development of individual functions and their evolving roles over time as children navigate their year in school.

We now have the opportunity to develop and apply specific pedagogic approaches and curriculum advances that will equip educational systems to strengthen explicitly those neurodevelopmental functions likely to exert enduring impacts on the lives of students.

We now have the opportunity to help students learn about learning while they are learning, i.e., acquire the needed insights on how to operate their minds in a more conscious and explicitly goal-directed manner.

We now have the opportunity to enable students to understand their own kinds of minds, their personal neurodevelopmental strengths, shortcomings and affinities.

We now have the opportunity to determine in an individual case when a particular function is missing or else under-developed, i.e., where the breakdown is occurring when a student struggles inordinately with specific academic demand.

Continued on back cover.

## Spotlight on Language, Literacy and Literature

A Newsletter of the ASCD Network

**Lenore Sandel, Ed.D., Facilitator**  
**Professor Emerita of Reading**  
**Hofstra University**

**Esther Fusco, Ph.D., Co-Facilitator,**  
**Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Teaching**  
**Hofstra University**

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## Co-Facilitator's Message "Missing Ingredients"

**Esther Fusco, Ph.D.**  
Assistant Professor  
Hofstra University

### Introduction

More and more is being written about designing curriculum that provides a systematic, balanced approach to teaching effective literacy instruction. Along with this goes an emphasis on the state and national standards, sequence of skills and regimented assessment of students. NCLB adds to this perspective and requires that students have highly qualified teachers delivering the literacy instruction. NCLB defines a highly qualified teacher as one that has a four-year college degree. Of course there is complete agreement with the need for highly qualified teachers. Our children should be educated by teachers who have a broad and comprehensive background and educational knowledge. In fact, teachers need to go beyond the four-year requirement and have advanced graduate degrees. Students have a greater chance of having a rich curriculum experience when instructed by highly qualified teachers. According to the *National Reading Panel Report* (2000), these highly qualified teachers also need to be able to include five major components of literacy in their daily teaching. These reading components include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The goal is to provide a balance of these components along with exposure to a rich array of literature through read alouds. These are the critical dimensions that are being discussed.

### Two Points

While the five literacy components and highly qualified teachers are all vital to good literacy learning, two salient points continue to be omitted in the discussion.

- First, all children do not arrive at school ready to learn.
- Second, each child that arrives comes with a different set of prior experiences, and development and this must be factored into the learning process.

These two factors are the missing ingredients in the discussion of an effective literacy program. Rosenblatt, in her book, reminds us that the teaching and learning experience is a transactional process and

thus the reader background is essential to successful reading comprehension.

Somehow, the component of the child, as an individual, has been lost or left out of the new conversation regarding literacy learning. The new testing mentality, which has gripped our country, is composed of a learning equation that ignores the whole child. Child development tells us that children arrive at school with different backgrounds and developmental levels. This must be factored into the learning process. It becomes important that the sequence of instruction be delivered at the student's level and at an appropriate rate to match the background experience that the child comes with to school. Vygotsky's work stressed teaching the children in their zone of proximal development. It is particularly important to reconsider the developing child in an age when more students are being taught through whole class scripted lessons. Where does the individual child fit in this type of literacy program? How can the child succeed if the child is not ready for the concepts and skills that are being taught through the whole class instruction? How can children who have different prior experiences succeed in texts that are not reflective of their background experiences?

Another concern related to child development is the content in our primary classes. PreK and kindergarten classes have changed dramatically. If you observe in kindergarten classes, you will notice that they look more like first grade classes. Primary teachers are being forced to teach students skills that were once introduced in first grade. I often wonder, as I observe in these classes, where have all the kindergartens gone? Teachers must carefully assess their students before introducing literacy tasks. They need to ensure that students, in these classes, are developmentally ready for these formal reading and writing activities. When children are forced to memorize information and perform skills that do not fit into their background nor match their developmental levels, problems arise. The results are that students become turned off to learning and do not want to sufficiently engage in reading in order to become independent readers. These are unfortunate results.

Today, there are increasing numbers of children who are being classified as learning disabled. Sometimes, this classification doesn't occur immediately in the primary grades. Many elementary students memorize information in content that is inappropriate and learn skills that they do

not really understand. This catches up with them. While these students memorize well enough to succeed and pass the fourth grade tests, they begin to have difficulty by eighth grade. They cannot sustain the process of learning materials that do not match their cognitive development and background experiences. They then become those students that require academic intervention services. This pattern is obvious as we look at the consistent drop in scores across the country from grade four to grade eight and the huge number of children who are receiving Academic Intervention Services (AIS). I believe that younger students are more willing to please their teachers and parents but as they approach pre adolescence, these attitudes plus the difficult content makes the memorization of information less appealing. This problem is even more pronounced in high-needs districts. More and more students fall behind because they do not have the skills necessary to meet the content demands. Students have been pushed. They are forced to memorize test taking strategies and deal with materials that are not relevant to them or appropriate developmentally. The students often have problems with content reading in all subjects. The results are more students who struggle and become turned off to the reading process.

### Purpose

What is my purpose in writing this? I am not advocating that we should not provide a balanced approach to teaching literacy instruction. I think that it is important to include all the five basic components of literacy in an integrated instruction. In fact, I strongly believe that teachers need more extensive training in literacy instruction than they are given at the undergraduate and graduate levels. What I am suggesting is that we need to remember the developing child in the equation. If our goal is to have every child be a reader, then we must be continually assessing the child as an individual and matching our instruction to the child's needs and interests. We need to create challenging but developmentally appropriate literacy experiences that support children in their progress. We need to have teachers educated in a rich array of literacy techniques that are used to reach students and encourage them to become students who love to read. For those students who may require more support, the response to intervention needs to be matched to the individual, not a one-size-fits-all remediation program.

If we believe that children's literacy learning is developmental and emerges naturally in

a systematic manner, then we should consider what McGee and Richgels have stated:

"No child's discoveries about and experiments with literacy exactly match those of another child. Furthermore, an individual child's literacy behaviors vary in sophistication depending on the task and the situation.

Literacy learning is developmental in a very commonsensical way to anyone who has spent time writing and reading with children. Literacy learning is developmental in the sense that what an individual child knows about writing and reading changes dramatically over time. Not only do children's constructions of literacy differ from those of adults, but children's present constructions also differ from their own former and future constructions." (McGee and Richgels, p. xix)

### Conclusion

Let us refocus our efforts to each child and revisit the basic principles of learning. We need to assess each student as an individual and recognize that his or her background and experience needs to be considered in the teaching and learning process. And finally, the literacy environment has to be constructed in a meaningful, integrated, developmentally appropriate environment.

### References

- McGee, Lea M. and Donald J. Richgels. (2000). *Literacy's Beginnings Supporting Young Readers and Writers*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Rosenblatt, Louise M. (1995). *Literature as Exploration*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1962). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press.

## Books in the Classroom

**By Ginny O'Sullivan and Fredi Norris**

***I Heard It From Alice Zucchini: Poems About the Garden* by Juanita Havill, Chronicle Books, 2006.**

This is the perfect getting-ready-for-springtime poetry book. We are led through an assortment of poems that celebrate planting seedlings, wandering vines, and all that grows in a garden. The charming illustrations add to the anticipation of the springtime planting! This is a great crop of poems!

***Theodore* by Frank Keating, Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2006.**

This is a stunningly written and illustrated picture book about the life and accomplishments of Theodore Roosevelt. Illustrations that look like fine oil paintings compliment the clear, concise text. The writing manages to convey complex ideas in a straightforward manner. Here is a book that is a fine example of one person's ability to make significant contributions and changes to our world.

***Hot Air: The (Mostly) True Story of the First Hot-Air Balloon Ride* by Marjorie Priceman, Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2005.**

The year is 1783. The place is just outside of Paris. Set sail on the first hot-air balloon ride with three unlikely traveling companions. A serious, fact-filled beginning explodes into a fanciful, hilarious tale that needs to be seen as well as read. Informative end papers add interesting factual information to this delightful story. This is a book that can appeal to readers of all ages.



***When You Are Happy* by Eileen Spinelli, Simon Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2006.**

Eileen Spinelli has written a gem of a book. It is a musical poem that celebrates the love and caring showered on a young girl by her family. Children and adults will easily identify with the moods and emotions expressed in this book. This book will make a great read aloud and a wonderful gift.

***Aesop's Fables* selected and illustrated by Lisbeth Zwerger, North-South Books, 2006.**

Yes, this is another Aesop's Fables book, but this is definitely one that you will want to have in your collection. The illustrations are filled with artful humor and draw you into the fables. Short but sophisticated language makes these tales perfect for upper-level discussions. The moral of this review is: Read this book!

## Book Reviews

**By Esther Fusco, Ph.D.**

***I Am Marc Chagall*  
By Bimba Landmann  
Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2005**

This book is based on the autobiography of Chagall. It is a charming, beautifully illustrated book about the life of this famous artist. It is inspiring for children because it speaks to having a passion for what we want to achieve in our lives. The book describes Chagall's accomplishments and how these were influenced by the values and experiences that he had in his hometown.

***Ice Cream: The Full Scoop*  
By Gail Gibbons  
Holiday House, 2006**

Once again Gail Gibbons creates an informational book that will appeal to readers. Ice Cream describes all the ways you can have this favorite treat. The book begins with an interesting history of the origin of ice cream and how it came to the United States. The book also tells how ice cream was developed into all the different types of creams that we have today. The book has all kinds of facts about ice cream including that more ice cream, is sold on Sunday than on any other day of the week.

***Honey: A Gift of Nature*  
By Yumiko Fujiwara  
Illustrated by Hideko Ise  
Kane Miller Book Publishers, 2006**

This beautifully illustrated book tells the story about how bees create honey and the problems connected to this process. The information is told through a child who accompanies her father to the mountains where he keeps bees.

***Mrs. Crump's Cat*  
By Linda Smith  
Pictures by David Roberts  
HarperCollins Publishers, 2006**

Would you want a sneaky, finicky troublesome wet yellow cat with fleas? This is the amusing story of how Mrs. Crump deals with a stray cat that arrives one rainy day at her door step. As Mrs. Crump tries to find the owner of the cat, new friendships are discovered. Animal lovers will enjoy this delightful story.

Continued on back cover.