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Book Reviews

Jay C. Thompson, Jr.

Book Review Editor

Teachers as Leaders: Not as Simple as It Seems!

One dictionary definition of a leader is “one who acts as a guiding force.” Exploring and applying this wording to education quickly makes it clear that the dictionary is describing teacher effectiveness. Perusal of the literature on leadership provides countless examples that teacher leaders know and use in their daily instructional routines. When developing and applying instructional leadership skills at higher levels, educators must reflect upon several questions:

- How should leadership skills be utilized in instruction?
- What are the appropriate learner responses to these skills?
- What teacher skills should be addressed and developed to enhance learning?
- How can we develop parental partnerships to strengthen the learning process?
- Can we develop collegial support that will focus upon increasing teacher effectiveness?

These questions demand answers; the teacher as leader is the new standard.

The road to professional growth, although enlightening and exciting, is often long and laborious. The following books present different points of view and models that can help us build the knowledge base and skills that undergird the concept of teacher as leader. Complex instructional needs require sophisticated responses. Leadership and effectiveness are essential to the process.

The Elements Of Learning

by James M. Banner, Jr.,
and Harold C. Cannon

New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999

Reviewed by Josh Hall

Department of Educational Psychology,
Ball State University, Muncie, Ind.

In *The Elements of Learning*, James Banner and Harold Cannon have tried to create a manual for students, and to some degree all of us, that conveys an important component of themselves: their passionate love and enjoyment of learning. As they note in the first chapter, “The adventure of learning, like all adventures, is full of surprises, excitement, and enjoyment.” In almost all respects, the authors have been successful in conveying their sense of enthusiasm.

The Elements of Learning is a relatively short, easy-to-read, occasionally humorous motivational guide geared especially toward secondary education

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and beginning college students. To this end, Banner and Cannon have filled the beginning chapters of their book with topics that identify those human qualities they feel are critical to learning: industry, enthusiasm, pleasure, curiosity, aspiration, imagination, self-discipline, civility, cooperation, honesty, and initiative. Additionally, each chapter is enriched with this reviewer's favorite text readings: anecdotal stories of students that illustrate each chapter's theme. They range from Bruce "The Tower" Byrd, who despite his unusual height and "nerd" affect built a rewarding career in medical research, to the intellectually brilliant Cynthia Grace, who alienated her professors and peers with arrogant behavior. Each story reinforces the authors' contention that learning consists of many facets that "are good not just for high school or college. They're good for life and most of life's situations." Banner and Cannon also supply plenty of humor, which adds to the breezy approach of the book. The favorite story of this reviewer centers on a theology professor who is late and attempting to catch a bus. One of his students stops him and comments that he only has two quick questions: "What's the meaning of life, and is there a God?"

The second half of *The Elements of Learning* deals with what the authors label "The Circumstances of Learning"—teachers and their relationships with students, with emphasis placed on conveying the perceptions, attitudes, goals, and tribulations of typical instructors. Mercifully, at least from the perspective of this professor, Banner and Cannon describe teachers as "human." More important, they appropriately summarize many points that relate to student interaction with instructors and convincingly impart their belief that learning is an interactive process in which both teacher and student are responsible.

Other chapters explore the topics of "what you learn" and "how you learn." Here the authors persuasively restate the historical argument that liberal arts curricula are necessary to the future success and well-being of high school and college students. Moreover, they offer solid advice about choosing a major in college. Their philosophy is that learning should be enjoyable: "A better principle to guide your choice of a major is to follow your greatest enthusiasm and interest in a particular subject."

"How to learn" is a topic that the authors address with some enthusiasm and specificity.

Appropriately, they provide a rationale for the importance of grades and further delineate the important factors and strategies involved in both the motivational and the pragmatic aspects of studying. Last, for high school students, the authors offer some well-honed advice regarding the transition to college.

The Elements of Learning, in general, approaches the topic of learning from a reflective orientation. Although not overspecific about behaviorally oriented actions and strategies, it nonetheless appears well-suited to help high school and college counselors assist underachieving students. This text should also be effective as a supplement to materials utilized by instructors in college orientation courses. Moreover, many adults, like this reviewer, will derive pleasure and insight from this account of one of the great pleasures of life: learning.

***The Educated Child: A Parent's Guide from
Preschool through Eighth Grade*
by William J. Bennett, Chester E. Finn, Jr.,
and John T.E. Cribb, Jr.**

(New York: The Free Press, 1999)

Reviewed by Kathy L. Church,
Department of Elementary Education,
Ball State University, Muncie, Ind.

In the midst of educational reform, *The Educated Child* provides parents with an informative viewpoint on a breadth of important issues. Chester E. Finn, Jr., and John T.E. Cribb, Jr., join William J. Bennett, the author of the well-known *Book of Virtues*, in presenting an easy-to-read and well-organized resource on education. Attempting to enlighten parents and empower them to play a civic role in educating their children, the authors take a no-nonsense, back-to-the-basics approach to informing parents about what their children should be learning in school, how schools are doing, and what parents need to do to ensure educational improvement.

The authors organize their book into three parts: "The Preschool Years," "The Core Curriculum," and "Making It Work." The first section emphasizes fostering a love of learning and building character. Subjects such as school readiness and licensing are included. Part Two presents a detailed view of the curriculum using excerpts from E.D. Hirsch's Core Knowledge Sequence. English, history and geography, art and music, mathematics, and science are highlighted. The remaining part is directed at informing and sup-

porting parents in several educational areas: study habits, assessment, grading, testing, disabilities, discipline, character education, drugs, and television habits. The section also addresses various additional school issues, from education standards to technology in the classroom. Controversial subjects such as religion in schools, sex education, tracking, and home schooling are included.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this book is the way it encourages active parental participation in education. By providing a reasonable background in important curriculum areas, *The Educated Child* informs and equalizes the role parents can play in their children's future. It also views the educational process as one that requires community participation and support. This progressive view is essential for real change in education.

The book establishes a strong foundation to understand the purpose and importance of education by giving parents background knowledge on various education issues and important core components of the curriculum at different grade levels. The book provides not only school-content expectations but also such sources as lists of "good" books and questions to ask in specific situations. It addresses the intimidation promoted by educational jargon and critiques certain educational practices.

It is with *The Educated Child's* critique of educational practices that this reviewer has concerns. The authors strive to establish a balance of ideas and viewpoints as they deal with educational practices. They build the case for their viewpoint and in many cases are fair to other viewpoints. The educational practices discussed include ability grouping, phonics, literature, character education, invented spelling, grammar, and "new" new math, among others. It is within this context that the authors' biases surface. Most of their views are conservative, based upon a "bottom up" or skill approach to education. The premise of such views stems from a behavioral perspective of teaching and learning.

A behavioral view of education is in and of itself an acceptable perspective. However, many of the practices that are gently and sometimes not-so-gently critiqued involve an "interactive," cognitive, or process viewpoint of teaching and learning. Many substantial contributions have been made to learning research and cognitive theory in the past decade. The authors' presentation of the topic is narrow—not so much incorrect as limit-

ing and possibly misleading to parents who take the information too literally. The authors' style, however, encourages this kind of strong and literal interpretation.

The Educated Child is successful in presenting information and ideas clearly and concisely. It encourages even passive parents to understand and participate in their children's education. The book provides valuable resources and can stimulate good conversation and debate, but its limited coverage of some topics makes it essential that the reader keep an open mind.

***Building Successful Partnerships:
A Guide for Developing Parent
and Family Involvement Programs
by National PTA***

Bloomington, Ind.: National Educational Services, 2000

Reviewed by Cathi L. Cornelius,
Department of Elementary Education,
Ball State University, Muncie, Ind.

For decades educators have asked the following questions: How do schools increase parental involvement? How do schools gain more community support and financing? How do schools improve academic standards and student achievement? How do schools change the school culture positively and boost morale? How do schools begin to address the needs of our diverse population and school communities? The National PTA recently responded to these questions by publishing a resource guide, *Building Successful Partnerships*.

The National PTA offers this ten-chapter "easy read" guide to help concerned individuals develop comprehensive parent, family, and community involvement in their schools and school districts. The text, uniquely, presents research findings and best-practice strategies to utilize in practical situations. Research findings from programs such as the New Haven-Comer Program in Clark County, Washington; Martin Luther King Elementary in New Orleans; Community Unit School District 300 in Carpentersville, Illinois; and Paul Robeson High School in Chicago are presented; recommendations are provided. The National PTA highlights these programs to present practical ways in which schools can form collaborative partnerships with parents and community members. The guide also provides research on cultural and socioeconomic differences. The text illustrates the importance of schools responding to the needs of specific pop-

ulations and explains how to reach out in support of specific populations—students of color, bilingual and multilingual groups, single and working families, divorced and blended families.

This multifaceted book provides invaluable information on educational issues such as latchkey students, conflict resolution, mentor-tutor-volunteer programs, parents as advocates, college and university partnerships, and site-based management. Strategies are outlined and thoroughly discussed, including improving parent involvement; communicating successfully with parents; ensuring effective PTAs and meetings; providing supportive parental-education programs; planning for long-term school community success; and breaking down barriers.

Finally, chapters 8 (“Overcoming Barriers and Reaching Out to Key Players”) and 9 (“Action Teams, Plans, and Parent/Family Involvement Policies”) offer holistic strategies, as well as a plan of action for successfully developing and implementing collaborative partnerships. A comprehensive survey section and resource section are also presented in the text to assist individuals in building partnerships.

Parents, teachers, administrators, program directors, and community leaders should find this guide an excellent, inexpensive resource.

***Balancing Principles for Teaching
Elementary Reading***

**by James V. Hoffman, James F. Baumann,
and Peter Afflerbach, with Ann M. Duffy-
Hester, Sarah J. McCarthey, and Jennifer
Moon Ro**

Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000

Reviewed by Diane Bottomley,
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Ball State University, Muncie, Ind.

A balanced perspective in reading instruction is a popular concept in the literacy field. Thus, the authors of *Balancing Principles for Teaching Elementary Reading* advocate balancing principles to assist teachers in establishing goals, planning for instruction, and modifying instruction for individual needs. The principles presented are convincingly rooted in current reading research. The authors of the text are all credible reading educators who work with classroom and preservice teachers. The structure of the text reflects its four purposes, which are: “(a) to offer a principled conception of reading and learning to read that is considerate of both the

personal dimensions of literacy acquisition as well as the changes that are taking place in society; (b) to summarize the key findings from research that relate specifically to effective teaching practices; (c) to describe current practices in reading instruction with specific comparisons to the principles of effective practice identified in the previous section; and (d) to suggest an action agenda that is school-based and designed to promote positive changes in the quality of instruction” (p. ix).

Several points anchor a set of principles for the authors’ professional stances. They include: (a) adapting to the changing levels of literacy in our society; (b) using pedagogy developed from research, not a prescribed program; (c) deciding about effective instruction based on the learner; and (d) providing ongoing support for teachers in order for them to be effective with all students.

In Part II, the authors present nine reading-instruction principles based on research. Teachers can use these principles for continued professional growth in understanding balanced reading. The first two parts of the book establish the theoretical and empirical basis for the balanced reading instructional principles. Part III examines these instructional principles in relation to historical and contemporary practices. The book’s final section discusses ways elementary schools can develop reading programs that are responsive to the needs of all children.

The authors invite readers to challenge and debate the ideas and conceptions presented in the book, to reflect on their beliefs about teaching, and to think beyond whole language, literature-based, phonics, and balanced instruction. In doing so, they are reminded of all educators’ shared commitment to improving reading instruction in our schools. The actual contribution of *Balancing Principles* will not be completely known until schools actually implement its recommendations and the professional literature documents their success.

***Understanding the Teacher Union Contract*
by Myron Lieberman**

New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2000

Reviewed by Julie Koschnick, Superintendent,
Northeastern Wayne School Corporation,
Fountain City, Ind.

Myron Lieberman, the author of *Understanding the Teacher Union Contract*, is a leading expert in the field of union negotiations and

tactics. The author has written several books on education: *Privatization and Educational Choice* (1989); *Public Education: An Autopsy* (1993); *The Teacher Unions* (1997); and *Teachers Evaluating Teachers: Peer Review and the New Unionism* (1998).

Here, Lieberman provides his readers with a clear, concise, straightforward viewpoint of union tactics, accompanied by several examples of the contract language often utilized by teacher negotiation teams. Rather than bash or discredit unions, he simply provides the reader with contract-language examples from actual teacher contracts. His approach demonstrates how such contract language could harm superintendents,

boards, and communities. After discussing why school boards would not want to allow such language in contracts, Lieberman suggests language that might be acceptable to boards that want to insert such language into the master contract.

As a first-year superintendent, I found *Understanding the Teacher Union Contract* beneficial. The examples and explanations provided by Lieberman were informative as well as educational. Lieberman's book will provide future school boards with a beneficial reference guide during contract negotiations. Areas that were once a mystery for boards and superintendents will now be common knowledge.