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Special Education Legal Alert

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This month's update identifies recent court decisions that respectively illustrate, within the context of jurisdictional variation, (1) the differences in substantive standards under the IDEA and Section 504/ADA, and (2) the variety of claims under the IDEA, including free appropriate public education (FAPE), functional behavioral assessments (FBAs)/behavior intervention plans (BIPs) extended school year (ESY), and independent educational evaluations (IEEs). For previous monthly updates and related publications, see perryzirkel.com.

On March 21, 2024, the Eighth Circuit issued a pair of officially published decisions in <i>Osseo Area School v. A.J.T.</i> and <i>A.J.T. v. Osseo Area Schools</i> for the respective IDEA and Section 504/ADA claims of the parents of a middle schooler with a rare form of epilepsy that requires assistance with everyday tasks including walking and toileting. Due to the high frequency and severity of seizures in the mornings, the child was unable to attend school until noon, which resulted in a 4.25-hour school day in elementary school and, upon the age-related move to middle school, further reduction to 3.0 hours. The parents requested that the IEP provide for late afternoon instruction because she was sufficiently able to learn until 6 pm. The district refused, and the parents filed for a due process hearing. Ruling that the district's failure to address the child's individual needs amounted to a denial of FAPE, the hearing officer ordered the district to provide 495 hours of compensatory education and to add certain services to her IEP for in-home instruction each day from 4:30 to 6:00 pm. The district appealed this IDEA decision, and the parents counter-claimed under Section 504 and the ADA. The federal district court in Minnesota affirmed the hearing officer's IDEA ruling and rejected the parents' Section 504/ADA claim. The parties appealed to the Eighth Circuit.	
The appellate court affirmed the hearing officer's and lower court's IDEA decisions in favor of the parents, liberally applying <i>Endrew F.</i> to the specific circumstances of the case.	Rejecting the notion that the IDEA's reach is limited to the regular hours of the school day, the court concluded that the district's "purely administrative decision" caused the child's <i>de minimis</i> progress overall and regression for toileting, thus violating <i>Endrew F.</i>'s "demanding" substantive standard for FAPE.
However, in a separate decision, the Eighth Circuit rejected the parents' Section 504/ADA claim, based on their failure to show that the district's refusal met the jurisdiction's requirement for "wrongful intent."	In a footnote, the court acknowledged that its bad faith or gross misjudgment standard, which dates back to an Eighth Circuit decision in 1982, "has been questioned." Nevertheless, the court concluded, without further discussion or even identification of whether the parents sought equitable or monetary relief, that "for the time being it remains the law of our circuit."

This case illustrates the continued testing of districts' regular practices against the IDEA's obligations for FAPE, which are oriented to the individual disability-based needs of the child, and the similarly unsettled and sometimes unsettling obligations under Section 504 and the ADA.

On March 7, 2024, the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals issued an officially published decision in *Alex W. v. Poudre School District R-1* that addressed various IDEA claims of the parents of a fourth grader with autism and both hearing and vision impairments. As a result of these disabilities, the child is substantially nonverbal and exhibits behaviors including grabbing, kicking, pulling hair, disrobing, eloping, and perseverating self-stimulatory actions. The IEP in the primary grades was in a self-contained special education class and included speech/language therapy (SLT) and occupational therapy (OT). As a result of the triennial reevaluation at the end of grade 3, the district's proposed IEP included less direct and more consultative OT. Disagreeing with the reevaluation, the parents requested and received an IEE at public expense that focused on SLT and OT. Still dissatisfied, the parents requested a publicly funded neuropsychological IEE. Upon the district's refusal, the parents arranged for it at their own expense. Near the end of grade 4, the district provided an FBA and a BIP. At the start of grade 5, the parents withdrew the child from the district and filed for a due process hearing. After ruling under the IDEA's statute of limitations that only the claims for grades 3 and 4 were at issue, the hearing officer concluded that the district provided the child with FAPE, but the parents were entitled to reimbursement for the second IEE. Both sides appealed to the federal district court in Colorado, which affirmed the hearing officer's decision. Both parties appealed to the Tenth Circuit.

The parents' first claim was that the IEP inadequately identified and addressed their child's behavioral needs, including the lack of a timely FBA and BIP.	Citing rather settled case law from various jurisdictions, the Tenth Circuit ruled that the IEP adequately addressed the child's behavioral needs, thus not requiring an FBA and BIP for FAPE.
The parents' second claim was that the IEP failed to meet the substantive standard for FAPE based on allegedly insufficient progress.	Finding it unnecessary to determine whether the child's actual progress was sufficient, the court pointed out that <i>Andrew F.</i> only required reasonable calculation of appropriate progress based on the snapshot approach.
The parents' third FAPE challenge was to the restructuring of the SLT and OT services.	The court also affirmed rejection of this claim, finding that the district relied on reasonable calculation on individual rather than institutional grounds.
The parents' next claim was that the grade 3 and grade 4 IEPs violated the IDEA by not providing ESY.	Again ruling in favor of the district, the Tenth Circuit concluded that the district's IEP team appropriately determined that the child was not entitled to ESY based on the jurisdiction's applicable regression/recoupment approach.
The parents' last claim was that the reevaluation did not meet the applicable IDEA standards.	Rejecting this contention, the Tenth Circuit ruled that the reevaluation passed muster for the challenged areas of autism and functional communications.
The district's only challenge on appeal was to the hearing officer's order, which the lower court upheld, requiring it to pay for the second IEE.	The Tenth Circuit reversed the payment order, relying on the IDEA regulation that entitles parents to "only one" IEE at public expense per school district evaluation.
The rulings in this case, which amounted to a shut-out in favor of the school district, illustrate the uphill slope that parents face in IDEA adjudication, often representing the significant disparity between the legal requirements of case law and the professional standards of proactive best practice.	

U.S. Department of Education Launches Government Coordinating Council to Strengthen Cybersecurity in Schools

The U.S. Department of Education (Department), in coordination with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), today launched the Government Coordinating Council (GCC) for the Education Facilities Subsector, a pivotal step forward in the national effort to enhance cybersecurity across K-12 educational institutions. This new council signifies an unprecedented level of collaboration between federal, state, tribal, and local governments to protect schools from cybersecurity threats. The Education Facilities Subsector is part of the Government Facilities Sector, one of 16 critical infrastructure sectors defined in Presidential Policy Directive 21.

In recent years, the K-12 cybersecurity landscape has become increasingly complex, with school districts across the country experiencing ransomware attacks that shut down schools and data breaches that expose sensitive health, financial, and educational data on students, families, and staff. The formation of the GCC is a direct response to these challenges, aiming to foster a more resilient and secure K-12 digital infrastructure through structured dialogue and shared best practices.

“The GCC embodies our commitment to ensuring the cybersecurity of our nation's schools,” said U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten in remarks delivered to K-12 educational leaders. “This initiative represents a monumental step forward in formalizing the partnership between federal, state, and local educational leaders in protecting our K-12 critical infrastructure.”

This collaborative effort builds on significant progress made by the Department in partnership with CISA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and other federal agencies. Notably, the launch follows the “Back to School Safely” K-12 Cybersecurity Summit hosted by First Lady Jill Biden at the White House in August, underscoring the Biden-Harris Administration's whole-of-government approach to addressing cyber incident prevention, mitigation and recovery in K-12 schools.

“The importance of protecting our schools, students, and educators from cyber threats cannot be overstated—I’m very proud of the work the Department of Education and CISA are doing in this critical area, working collaboratively with the K-12 community,” said CISA Director Jen Easterly. “I am especially excited that the Education Facilities Subsector Government Coordinating Council is being launched today; it will have a vital role in helping to guide efforts to ensure a safer and more resilient learning environment for our classrooms across the nation.”

The GCC's inaugural meeting brought together a diverse group of educational stakeholders, including technology leaders, superintendents, school principals, as well as leaders from state agencies and educational service agencies to outline the GCC's objectives and strategic direction.

The GCC marks a significant milestone in the implementation of the National Cybersecurity Strategy, promising a safer, more secure future for students, teachers, and communities across the country. The Department of Education is committed to continuing its work with federal, state, and local partners to strengthen cybersecurity measures and ensure that our schools remain safe and supportive learning environments for all students.

U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Resolves Restraint and Seclusion Compliance Review

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) announced that the Denton Independent School District in Texas has entered into a resolution agreement to ensure that its restraint policies and practices do not deny students with disabilities a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

OCR's review identified a number of concerns with the district's compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II) and their implementing regulations with respect to district restraint practices.

In particular, OCR's review revealed that students ultimately identified as students with disabilities were restrained multiple times before the district initiated an evaluation to determine whether the students may need special education or related aids and services. For example, the district restrained one student 18 times before conducting an evaluation that resulted in the district classifying the student as a student with a disability for whom appropriate supports could obviate a need for restraint. OCR also identified concerns with the frequency and duration of student restraints. For example, the district restrained at least 12 students 10 or more times per student and the district restrained one student 43 times; in another example the district restrained a student on two separate occasions for more than an hour each time. District documentation often did not indicate that the district considered the impact of the restraints on the student's receipt of FAPE from the district.

OCR's review also revealed that the district permitted School Resource Officers (SROs) to restrain students with disabilities without having been properly trained on student restraint in educational settings or on the district's obligations regarding the provision of FAPE to students with disabilities and OCR also found that district staff lacked a consistent understanding of when it would be appropriate for an SRO to assist with student restraints. This inconsistency is reflected, for example, by SROs' frequent involvement in restraints even in the absence of probable cause to believe a crime was being committed, contrary to the district's stated position that SROs should only be involved in criminal matters.

To read more, click here

<https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-office-civil-rights-resolves-restraint-and-seclusion-compliance-review-denton-independent-school-district-texas>

English/Language Arts Instructional Design and the Criterion of the Least Dangerous Assumption

By Monica I. Floreani

Abstract

English/Language Arts (ELA) teachers working within a wide variety of student populations face options in adopting a literacy model that improves educational results for students. Interpretation and implementation of educational philosophy for teachers who are vulnerable to scrutiny of appropriate service delivery involves distinguishing between Liberal Humanist Critical Reading or Critical Literacy Pedagogy (Cervetti, 2001). Choosing between distinctive approaches to criticality entail instructional designs with potentially different long-term effects on learning outcomes. Because there is no reliable standard to ensure optimal functioning, the criterion of the least dangerous assumption (Donnellan, 1984) may be key to evaluating literacy models as a form of intervention that develop students' critical thinking skills and supports collaborative family-school relationships.

Keywords: Critical Literacy Pedagogy, Critical Social Justice Education, English/Language Arts (ELA), Evidence-Based Practice Interventions, Family-School-Community Relationship, Free and Appropriate Public Education, Individualized Educational Plan, Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade, Individualized Educational Program, Liberal-Humanism Critical Reading, Multi-Tier System of Supports/Response to Intervention, Students with Disabilities, Universal Design for Learning

Introduction

The content discussed in English/Language Arts (ELA) classrooms is essential to shaping the way students make sense of the world and articulating a worldview (Beach et al. 2003). Critical reading and critical thinking are commodities for individual and collective wellbeing. Literacy is a resource learners can draw from to address their problems and enhance their potential. Thus, the acknowledgement of the power of literature to shape the values of the individual and to affect the course of society may be deeply ingrained in teachers. Teacher preparation and parent training for coherent approaches to literacy learning. Criteria for reading selections and instructional goals are integral to the role of schools in developing constructive attitudes toward human relations through value stances associated with literacy. Therefore, interventions involving teacher preparation and parent training for developing students' critical thinking skills benefit from prioritizing instructional decisions that do not presume incompetence.

Short of a reliable standard to ensure optimal functioning, the criterion of the least dangerous assumption may be the most relevant factor in evaluating competing literacy models. This criterion asserts “educational decisions should be based on assumptions which, if correct, will have the least dangerous effect on the student” (Donnellan, 1984, p. 1). Because the criterion is to presume competence, understanding the synergistic and cumulative impact of literacy models can inform curricular decisions that have long-term effects on learning outcomes. Following the criterion of the least dangerous assumption in instructional program design can impact parent involvement, evaluation of students with disabilities, and collaborative education mechanisms (Gaitan-Delgado, 2012). In the context of inclusive education, criteria to presume competence, respect freedom of conscience, support autonomous voices, and maintain high expectations are closely interrelated.

Free and Appropriate Public Education does not require schools to maximize students’ potential or offer a specific program, but it requires schools to provide services that are “reasonably calculated” to help ensure academic progress. Students with disabilities have the right to receive an equal education to that of non-disabled students. However, improved educational results rely on how well public schools provide higher quality assurance. As members of the team that creates the Individualized Educational Plan, parents and teachers provide input based on the student’s ELA needs. Thus, demystifying the connection between literacy theory and instructional practice is conducive to a productive family-school relationship interested in a well-planned instructional design.

The instructional decisions facing ELA teachers within the context of a Universal Design for Learning framework involve Liberal Humanist Critical Reading or Critical Literacy Pedagogy (Cervetti, 2001). Coherent approaches to teaching and learning must be sought when inclusive education teachers adopt instructional practices related to objective or relativist views on knowledge, reality, language, authorship, discourse, and goals of education. If a literacy model is incompatible with the presumption of competence teachers may deprive a wide variety of student populations of measurable skills and core knowledge they should be engaging with to meet academic standards. In this way, adopting instructional strategies aligned with theoretical literacy models may be understood as a kind of large-scale intervention.

Theoretical Differences between Literacy Models

According to Crumpei et al. (2017), social consciousness is shaped by neurological systems that assimilate information on the basis of logical and experimental demonstrations to which students participate at various cognitive levels. Criteria for Liberal Humanism Critical Reading and Critical Literacy Pedagogy ground cohesive approaches to text selections, classroom discourse, and student assessment based on distinct instructional goals (Cervetti et al., 2001). Wilson (2007) maintains both literacy models attempt to disturb the students’ worldview and provoke learning discomfort to help them engage more reflectively in the world and be more aware and understanding of a diversity of perspectives. Liberal Humanism Critical Reading is based on logical reasoning and close-reading skills while Critical Literacy Pedagogy’s sociocultural strategies “downplay essential literacy skills and highlight a set of social practices involved in informal learning” (Perry, 2012, p. 51). The textual analysis conducted by these theoretical models subsumes value stances that are aligned with their respective learning objectives. The

sets of values that undergird these models consequently serve as a basis of informed thinking that advances students' capacity for responding to the ideas of others and expanding their social understanding.

Ontologically, Liberal Humanist Critical Reading assumes a conception of the world outside the text, but Critical Literacy Pedagogy does not. This may impact students' worldview in terms of value stances related to human nature, what counts as real, and notions of freedom. An underlying assumption of Critical Literacy Pedagogy is that humans are social constructs and cannot have objective access to reality because there is no neutral context from which to think (Winograd, 2016). This leads to the logical conclusion that no universal human essence, no stable personal identity, and no inherent human value exist (Ferrando, 2013). Thus, the radical skepticism about whether objective knowledge is obtainable that characterizes the social constructivist perspective contrasts the perspective of Liberal Humanism that individuals are endowed with inherent dignity and natural rights. By extension, the Identitarian/Collectivist lens of Critical Literacy Pedagogy is undermined by indiscriminate tolerance while Liberal Humanism Critical Reading fosters a Universalist/Individualist perspective that supports tolerance for all different viewpoints.

Epistemologically, Critical Literacy Pedagogy is unconcerned with falsehood, or the objectivity of laws and knowledge derived through logical reasoning. Under this model, students insert meaning into texts rather than interpret the author's intent (Cervetti et al., 2001); they approach textual meaning-making as a process of construction rather than exegesis and are tasked with problematizing the norm as the only way of looking at an issue (Lee, 2009). Conceptually, text is merely instrumental, and all knowledge is perceived as culturally constructed to gain or keep power. Text defined as including semiotic material of any mode, whether vetted or not, and its function is to encourage students to challenge the status quo for the purpose of attaining more equitable conditions through social action (New London Group, 2000).

Instructional Practices

Critical Literacy Pedagogy instructional planning-- including text selections, class discourse, activities, homework, and assessments-- stems from Critical Social Justice Education guidelines (Bell, 2016). Therefore, the metalanguage of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1989) provides students the "right" discourse for articulating Marxist/neo-Marxist and poststructuralist socio-political stances (Pinar & Bowers, 1992) and suppressing opposing viewpoints (Wallace, 2003). Behrman's (2006) metanalysis of Critical Literacy Pedagogy classrooms noted no collaborative organizational structures. Rather, all classrooms reflected an authoritative approach to instructional practice. Within a traditionally hierarchical organization, teachers prescribed and graded value stances rooted in the content of Critical Social Justice Education (Bell, 2016). Students "didn't have the choice to keep the journal topic, and the teacher read and responded to the journal entry (though journal entries are anonymous). Students were even instructed what and how to write in their journals" (Behrman, 2016, p. 496). Critical Literacy Pedagogy's structural design raises questions about students' freedom of conscience and speech as they strive to make meaning for themselves. To engage different voices that share students' beliefs, content must be subject to criticism and learning environments must be non-threatening and.

Even though presenting more than one viewpoint as a respectable argument in class discussions has been shown to increase understanding and improve reasoning, viewpoint discrimination as a form of intellectual intolerance in academic settings may be on the rise (Naudé, 2021). Critical Literacy's seminal principle of "Repressive Tolerance" rejects tolerance for all viewpoints (Marcuse, 1965). For critical theorists, Yousefi et al. (2015) affirm, "tolerance is not considered a principle, since it is believed to be a factor leading towards the dominance of the ideologies which are already ruling the society and also the reason that freedom of speech is of no effect against the ruling dominance" (p. 108). Therefore, the model effectively acts as an intervention to promote a critical consciousness, or "conscientização" (Freire, 1970), that transforms learners into adopting a "way of being, living, learning, and teaching" (Vasquez, 2019) designed to repress views that are inconsistent with its tenets (Goldberg and Kaufmann (2023). This transformation in students' worldview is "organically" constructed in ways that cut across the curriculum (Vasquez, 2010) based on a Marxist/neo-Marxist and poststructuralist perception of sociopolitical claims (though unmeasurable and unfalsifiable) about culture, identity, and power. Goldberg and Kaufmann (2023) point out teachers may treat tenets of Critical Literacy Pedagogy as uncontested truths rather than as one social theory among others. In other words, despite its postmodern and poststructuralist rejections of objective truth and reality, Critical Literacy Pedagogy may lead teachers and students to disregard alternative viewpoints on complex issues.

To transform societal norms, students work within established critical discourse against hegemonic power imbalances rather than question the complicated nature of power imbalances. Critical Literacy Pedagogy's multiliteracies approach includes student led project-based learning using social media platforms. Students' ability to identify persuasive or propagandistic narrative, however, may be undermined by the tenets that inform the ELA content. Giselsson (2020) suggests the model's reliance on ethos and pathos to sustain ideological critique may effectively disable evaluative criteria with which to measure the validity of truth claims. Students' agency to engage in resistance reading (Behrman, 2006) is limited by an ideological stance and assessment scheme that grounds literacy learning in the sociopolitical stances of Critical Social Justice Education. Therefore, it may be argued that students' freedom to reason through problems is compromised by a presumption of incompetence. Teaching students prescribed "right answers" and "definitive solutions" to vexing social issues may truncate critical thinking, freedom of conscience, and freedom of speech. Furthermore, it may violate the criterion of the least dangerous assumption for a wide variety of student populations.

An approach to problem solving that limits creativity, innovation, and autonomy is not to present multiple viewpoints to issues as respectable alternatives (Goldberg & Kaufmann, 2023). To justify illiberalism, critical pedagogy proponents argue "there is no such thing as a neutral position, and it needs to be recognized that youth and community work is about taking sides" (Beck & Purcell, 2013, p. 2). However, top-down style of instruction can be inhibiting and result in large-scale tunnel thinking on big questions. Beck's (2005) probe into Critical Literacy Pedagogy found "authoritative students may intimidate socially subordinate students into silence or conformity...In these circumstances, the classroom exhibits not democratic power sharing but an uneven, one-sided form of control that contradicts the mutuality necessary for true dialogue" (p. 394-395). Goldberg and Kaufmann (2023) pointed to a rise in negative learning experiences attributed to the expanding use of Critical Literacy Pedagogy.

Similarly, Wilson (2016) noted critical literacy students manifested resistance and disengagement when controversial texts were introduced. By creating a dichotomy between what might constitute home or personal beliefs and school sanctioned beliefs, violations of freedom of conscience may even result in moral injury (Williamson et al, 2021). Seas (2006) indicates repressive tolerance may create resistance on the part of students:

When students are asked to shift not only their perspectives, but also their subjectivities as they accept or reject assumptions that contribute to the pedagogical arguments being constructed [they] reject the teacher's message because they see it as coercive, they do not agree with it, or they feel excluded by it (p. 427).

Furthermore, Apple (2008) posits discrimination may occur within classroom discussions prompting biased treatment based on beliefs students hold. Knowles (2019) asserts “within academic scholarship, very few researchers or theorists advocate for conservative notions of civic education in recent decades” (p. 263). Critical Literacy Pedagogy’s seminal theorists promote intolerance, placing the onus in selecting a literacy model and managing the relationship between theory and practice on individual teachers. The philosophical undercurrents of these literacy models are likely to have implications for the development of academic skills, social aims, character development, aesthetic sensibility, and critical thinking. Therefore, making nuanced instructional decisions in shaping students involves resisting oversimplistic binary determinations that propagate errors in reasoning. Students who struggle with comprehension may be among the most affected by the differences between these paradigmatic models.

Being a bridge builder for students with disabilities infers utilizing evidence-based practice interventions for literacy to include a respectful and free exchange of ideas. Meyers and Jones (1993) determined that the integration of theory and practice involves activities that allow students to question, clarify, confirm, and internalize new knowledge. Students’ determination of whether a teacher respects their contributions in class, or even wants contributions at all, is critical in creating an active learning environment (Meyers & Jones, 1993). Though it may be argued that Liberal Humanism Critical Reading propagates social norms, toleration for open debate and argumentation make it the model, par excellence, for academic freedom. Critical Literacy Pedagogy, on the other hand, centers on social critique anchored in radical Utopianism that dismisses logical reasoning as an overarching evaluative criterion with which to weigh truth claims (Lee, 2009).

Beyond functional literacy and higher levels of comprehension, students of Liberal Humanism Critical Reading engage in textual interpretation that requires reading in between the lines. The model is not subordinate to metalanguage or reference to a sociopolitical, literary-historical, or autobiographical context. Rather, students approach text for personal growth as context-independent and recognize inherent value in literature’s own meaning and artistic craft (Davies, 1992). It emphasizes aesthetic appreciation of the text as an organic whole unit of art. Analysis of literary elements like setting, plot, and theme are considered in making predictions and testing hypotheses as readers suspend judgment until evidence is presented. Close reading and analysis, including investigating sources, recognizing author’s purpose, and making inferences serve to practice forming judgments and detecting rhetorical devices in ways that emphasize the importance of differentiating fact from opinion, or truth from fantasy. The goal of close verbal

analysis is to appreciate a work of literature holistically while connecting readers to what is "fixed and enduring" in their own identity. This creates dispositions that favor self-critique rather than insularity. Interpretation of text includes unearthing authorial intention or meaning as a basis for understanding (Bond & Wagner, 1966) while also eliciting interpretations from the reader (Agrast, 1970) and focusing on how the author uses language to convey points. Its practices are not expected to develop naturally through student led efforts, they must be taught explicitly or actively promoted by teachers (Cervetti, 2001).

Criticality and Intentionality

Critical reading is conceived and practiced in considerably inconsistent ways since critical thinking as a concept has diffused into competing definitions, leading teachers to differ in their approaches to criticality in ELA instruction (Wilson, 2007). Though teaching criticality means different things to different ELA teachers, Ennis (1985) defines the basic meaning of critical thinking as "reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (p. 45). Davies and Barnett (2015) define critical thinking as the capacity to make "reasoned judgement" (p. 16). Bloom's original and updated taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) holds logical reasoning among the higher order thinking skills, which involve determining the validity of arguments based on whether premises are true. The cycle within which reading comprehension supports literacy involves the ability to readily identify bias in validity statements (Pu & Xu, 2023) by weighing truth claims. To prevent or obfuscate this process by presuming incompetence may suppress students' development of logical reasoning and autonomous thinking.

Cognitive views of literacy have shifted to more sociocultural perspectives in past years (Dyson 2001). However, the traditional response practices of Liberal Humanism Critical Reading have been shown to yield better learning outcomes than Critical Literacy Pedagogy's youth led project-based learning with a focus on power struggles associated with progressive social movements (Edwards, 2009). At the expense of proficiency of student writing skills in composition, O'Dair (2003) suggests Critical Literacy Pedagogy's "focus [is] almost exclusively on ideological matters. To this end, recently advocated pedagogies privilege activism over 'language instruction'" (p. 593). Likewise, Perry (2012) admits that "focusing on sociopolitical analysis with an emphasis on power does little for struggling learners in need of basic literacy skills" (p. 65). Despite the politization of the curriculum, literacy policies and standardized assessments continue to be mostly shaped by cognitive and psycholinguistic perspectives that concentrate on the formal skills and processes by which people become literate (Muth & Perry, 2010).

A significant body of research suggests that sociocultural instructional approaches with a vague focus on process rather than clarity of knowledge and purpose of ability is generally less academically effective (Archer & Hughes, 2010; Edwards, 2009; Klinger et al., 2016). In general, struggling readers have lower reading comprehension, an essential factor in academic success and the ultimate goal of reading instruction. Well-integrated high leverage practices are essential to the chain of skills undergirding reading comprehension that is key to supporting readers with low-comprehension (Riccomini et al., 2017). Therefore, educators must be intentional in teaching reading accuracy and speed using evidence-based practices such as

explicit and direct teaching (Fuchs et al, 2018; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2015). Because reading can also be understood as a transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1977) a student's background, language, and vocabulary knowledge also play important roles in reading comprehension. "As early print experiences have importance for later formal learning" (Lynch, 2009, p. 194), it can also be assumed that middle and high school text experiences have importance for more advanced learning to ensue. The literacy process is lifelong and effective instructional practices can have a cumulative effect.

Many schools cannot adequately resolve the current youth mental health (Leeb et al., 2020; Panchal et al., 2021; Curtin & Heron, 2019; Kessler et al., 2005; Lipari et al., 2016) or literacy crises in the United States (DOE, 2021, 2023). Although Multi-Tier System of Supports/Response to Intervention may not meet the needs of all struggling students, it is incumbent upon teachers to make instructional choices that set learners up for success in all areas of suspected ability. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding Liberal Humanism Critical Reading and Critical Literacy Pedagogy may determine the sets of skills and values that students develop. Prioritizing educational principles over ideological or political influences favors an students' chances of academic achievement.

The Family-School Relationship

Best practices in education entail academic experiences that hold students to high expectations and make them feel valued. "Only by creating a new paradigm, or shared belief, of high expectations based on the principle of the least dangerous assumption can anyone, parent or professional, make decisions about students' educational programs that will lead to a quality life in school and throughout their adult lives" (Jorgensen, 2005). Suggestions offered by family, society, and educators, whose status as peers and leaders imparts didactic, scientific, and moral authority on the suggestibility capacity of the human psyche help shape the educational process (Crumpei et al., 2017). While character education may be found in the explicit curriculum, its nuances are informed by many factors, including the school community's cultural expectations, values, and perspectives on curricular topics.

Conflicting value stances promoted by Liberal Humanism Critical Reading and Critical Literacy Pedagogy, however, may breach the trust that drives the family-school-community relationship. Students may feel torn when a wedge is systematically driven between the "ways of being" promulgated by classroom discourse and the normative "ways of being" promulgated by some families or communities (Williamson et al., 2021). Critical Literacy Pedagogy's principle of "Repressive Tolerance" is especially directed toward Judeo-Christian morality as part of the cultural hegemony (Marcuse, 1955). Even though a distinctly anti-logocentric stance to education is in itself illiberal, dismissal of logocentrism as antiquated, harmful even, may conflict with students' personal freedoms to develop other kinds of worldview. Gaitan-Delgado (2016) sustains "the knowledge of what and how parents need to negotiate with the school to advocate for their children is often culturally bound" (p. 306). However, for families to intervene on behalf of their children, knowledge of the curriculum must be made accessible.

Approximately half of parents of K-12 students hold that teachers and administrators at their children's school have values that are at least somewhat like their own and trust in school

principals has been decreasing since 2020 (Horowitz, 2023). In providing guidance to parents who seek it, concerns over a lack of instructional transparency or impartiality to ideological persuasions may be a relevant issue for the multidisciplinary IEP team to discuss. Meaningful collaboration among stakeholders in inclusive settings, according to Rock et al. (2009), supports the needs of all students, but sustained collaboration between parents and school officials is especially beneficial to students with disabilities. The collective expertise of an IEP team shares interest in research-based interventions over ineffective ones and identifying whether sets of values reflected by literacy models affect the academic and behavioral outcomes of students may be an equally important consideration.

Conclusion

Since Liberal Humanism Critical Reading and Critical Literacy Pedagogy entail different definitions of critical thinking, teachers' critical activities could derive justification from potentially opposite sets of assumptions for understanding texts at the intersections of language, literacy, literature, and culture. Thus, parents and educators in favor of the complementary roles of Critical Social Justice Education, Social Emotional Learning, and Critical Literacy Pedagogy hold that it supports student well-being, while others consider it emotional manipulation and want it banned (Horowitz, 2023). Goldberg and Kaufman (2023) affirm Critical Social Justice Ideology has "a harmful effect on young people and negatively impacts the very people it purports to help" (p. 2). As a deterrent to negative learning experiences (Williamson et al., 2021), some states extended parental rights to resist Critical Social Justice Education stances to ninth grade. Recent scrutiny of the criteria for ELA instructional goals and text selections has led to policy reforms on parental rights in education that reinforce parents' fundamental right to make decisions regarding the appropriateness of texts in many U.S. public-school settings (Sosin, 2022).

Potentially long-term effects of literacy as a social practice may influence how learners' axiomatic systems rationally process understanding of reality. Belief in a common human nature, scientific rationality, and the search for truth as universal knowledge may no longer reflect mainstream attitudes in education. Appealing to the least dangerous assumption as a standard can support a vision of freedom of thought and quality education for all students. Moreover, growing awareness of literacy models as interventions may help drive consensus of what free and "appropriate public education for all" means. Devoid of a "national curriculum, teachers have tended to assert their professional autonomy quite explicitly. Given this sense of self-determination, an important question arises about ways in which English teachers see and make choices in subject aims and content" (Davies, 1992, p. 193). Teachers' identities and personal-professional commitments influence their engagement with the texts and their students (Schwab, 2013), but support for teachers' right to select texts has waned (Hawkman et al., 2024) due to increased attention to ethical considerations surrounding intellectual freedom and social responsibility in the post-truth era (Hazelton-Boyle & Hazelton-Boyle, 2023). Better training in special education policies that support the most researched interventions and instructional designs for a wide variety of student populations may help guide future discretionary decisions in selecting texts that depict a diverse set of places, experiences, and voices that foster spatial and temporal self-awareness in students.

By prescribing definitive answers to complex issues, literacy instruction may presume incompetence and violate Donnellan's (1984) criterion of the least dangerous assumption which "holds that in the absence of conclusive data educational decisions ought to be based on assumptions which, if correct, will have the least dangerous effect on the likelihood that students will be able to function independently as adults" (p. 1) This criterion calls into question limitations on the development of critical thinking posed by the discursive elements and Repressive Tolerance of Critical Literacy Pedagogy. Developing students' critical thinking skills necessitates an objective standard for judging the strength and soundness of arguments (Giselsson, 2020). In addressing complex issues, a priori rejection of opposing viewpoints may truncate students' logical reasoning processes with long-term effects on how they develop social consciousness and worldview.

Because ethics is the reasoning about the rightness and wrongness of conduct, logic plays a foundational role in processing ethical decision making. Truth and knowledge claims would seem baseless without foundational principles and reasons that underlie the "notions of rational deliberation and critical judgment, but also the notions of rational and moral conduct" (Scheffler, 1989, p. 76, as cited in Biesta p. 39). The relativization of language to signify that meaning is created by it rather than given by it tends to complicate philosophical problems. This approach to language may facilitate the manipulation of truth and knowledge in ways to suggest spurious correlations and confound young students who lack relevant background knowledge on complex issues. The more experienced and expert the students, the less likely rhetorical persuasion will override logical reasoning.

Knowles (2018) sustains that empirical evidence can point to how criticality is understood and embedded in instructional decisions. Because ELA prepares students to think critically, it is important to understand how practices align with distinct theoretical models. Students are not objects of intervention but participants within a transitory relational understanding whose interest lies in their interaction with local and global communities. Thus, it may be argued that Critical Literacy Pedagogy students are held to learning objectives tied to formulaic sociopolitical stances that violate their freedom of conscience. Moreover, the model may violate the criterion of least dangerous assumption-- if its underlying assumptions are wrong-- its presumption of incompetence could result in long-term harm for students.

Declaration of competing interest

None

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About the Author

Born in Arlington Heights, Illinois, Monica moved to Mar del Plata, Argentina, in elementary school. She completed middle and high school in Wilmette, Illinois, and then moved to Lugano, Switzerland, where she studied Humanities. As a certified Montessori Teacher and School Director in Early Childhood Education, her career began with student centered and cooperative approaches to teaching and learning. Her graduate studies in English Education prepared her to work with a wide range of K-12 students. She speaks English Spanish, Italian, and French and has collaborated in a variety of educational settings within Special Education. She provided supervision of teacher training programs and oversight for compliance of federal, state, and local licensing mandates, and coordination of special educational and health services as a Family Services Coordinator in Head Start and as Teacher Mentor and Disabilities Coordinator at The United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education Demonstration School. She later taught English (6-12) and Spanish (K-12) in inclusive general education classrooms in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. As a 2022 federally funded TEACH LAB PROJECT scholar, she received intensive training to improve services and results for students with disabilities. Building connections between the areas of Language, Literacy, Literature, and Culture and important topics within Special Education is at the forefront of her interests within the field. She holds a B.A. in Liberal Arts/Humanities and an Ed.S. in Curriculum and Instruction. She is currently a PhD candidate in Language, Literature Literacy, and Culture in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Florida International University.

The Use of Action Research for Pre-Service Teachers to Learn Reflective Practices

By Dr. Jessise S. King

Abstract

This paper explores the integration of action research into pre-service teaching programs to foster reflective practices among aspiring educators. Originating from Kurt Lewin's work in 1944, action research offers a systematic approach to investigating classroom issues and refining instructional strategies. By examining collaborative action research (CARS) and its role in creating inclusive educational environments, this paper underscores the significance of action research in addressing pedagogical challenges and promoting systemic change. Through practical avenues such as mentor-teacher collaboration and strategy implementation, pre-service teachers engage in reflective practices to enhance their pedagogical skills. This structured approach not only facilitates professional growth but also cultivates a culture of continuous improvement within the educational community. Overall, integrating action research into pre-service teacher education proves instrumental in enhancing reflective practices, improving teaching effectiveness, and advancing student learning outcomes.

The Use of Action Research for Pre-Service Teachers to Learn Reflective Practices

Since 1944, when Kurt Lewin first devised the term action research or field theory, many educational professionals have used it as a form of “reflective teaching” (Pracht, Toelle, & Broaddus, 2022). While many forms of “reflective teaching” have emerged over the years, this article will explore the usefulness of Action Research in pre-service teaching programs. First, let's look at the definition of action research and what that means to preservice teachers.

Action Research is a process of investigating a particular issue, problem, or phenomenon that occurs within the context of the classroom. For example, a teacher may use action research to determine which specific strategy works best to teach a given concept, or which student placement works best for a given class. This type of research is not to add to universal knowledge, although it can be shared with others, it is more an attempt to solve a problem and for teachers to improve their craft of teaching within the educational community. Action Research is a systematic regime that enables preservice teachers to present, develop and make meaning of their classroom instruction and connection of theory to practice.

From the beginning, preservice teachers are taught theory upon, theory upon theory, of what the best scientific approaches are used for teaching students to learn particular concepts. While this is a necessary step for pre-service teachers to gain an understanding of why these approaches are effective, it is when they are in the classroom environment that their inquiries come into play. They ask themselves; how did this lesson go? What should I do differently? Or even, if I notice

that little Johnny didn't make the connection between addition and multiplication, how can I help him to make those connections? These are the real-world types of queries that are exemplary for action research.

In Action research, the teacher identifies a problem within the class, for example, the teacher notices that there is a connection gap between what is being taught and the student's ability to connect their prior knowledge. The teacher then creates a plan of action that they believe will solve the problem, implements the plan, and collects data. Once the data is collected, the teacher would then review the data to determine what the next course of action will be. The teacher would then share this data and information with others. In this way they are providing professional development opportunities within their educational communities as well as learning more about their individual classroom practice, enriching their pedagogical repertoire, as well as enhancing the learning opportunities of their students. This type of inquiry is perfect for pre-service teaching programs as it affords preservice teachers the occasion to learn the process of investigating their perceptions of how students learn, as well as the opportunity to try new strategies and document student progress.

What does the research say about action research for preservice teachers? In a study completed by Constantia and Christos in 2019, it was noted that the key to creating a cohesive inclusive educational environment for all students is using collaborative action research (CARS) a form of action research that involves more than one researcher (Constantia & Christos, 2019). They portrayed action research to be an avenue to create an inclusive environment for all students by involving all stakeholders to promote pedagogical change. Messikh, (2020), also agreed that using action research was an important factor in using creative and innovative ways of solving problems that are unique to his/her classroom (Messikh, 2020). He stated that the use of action research is not something new, as it was implemented in the 1940s, the use of educational action research was a method of helping schools improve their curriculums and bridge any gaps between what is being taught and what was shown in the research. Investigating the gaps in pedagogy and outcomes enabled teachers to make better-informed instructional decisions to ensure that all students were able to reach their full learning potential (Messikh, 2020). While these references were discussing teachers and not preservice teachers, they do illuminate the need to assess and reassess their teaching experiences that will connect theory to practice.

Parkhouse, Gorlewski, Senechal, and Lu, indicated in their 2021 article that teachers can promote systemic change in pedagogical approaches that are needed to address relevant inequalities in the classroom by challenging teachers to rethink their understanding of student behaviors (Parkhouse, Gorlewski, Senechal, & Lu, 2021). While their study focuses more on the student's behaviors in relation to the culturally relevant educational roles of teachers to address these behaviors, they make important connections between the use of action research and the ability to change the dynamics of classrooms through teachers' abilities to increase engagement and achievement of all students. Marianne Young, (2021) concurred with this concept in her thesis "Becoming A Flexible Teacher Through Critical Reflective Journaling." Young stated that critical reflection is a concept that requires the teacher to purposely reflect on a class, a lesson, or an activity to better identify the strategies they need to use for their particular setting. This perception was also affirmed by Slade, Burnham, Catalana, and Waters's article (2019), "The Impact of Reflective Practice on Teacher Candidates' Learning." Their article indicated that the use of action research in the preservice teacher program helps them with the connection

of course content to real-world applications (Slade, Burnham, Catalana, & Waters, 2019). Their article also specified that by reflecting on their engagement during preservice activities helps to facilitate their continual examination of their perceptions, potential biases, and level of instructional decision-making. Their study furthermore denotes that teacher reflective practices, such as action research, are decisive when teaching students in poverty, extreme poverty, or at risk as these students face innumerable challenges in the educational setting. These assertions were first established by Hibajene M. Shandomo, (2010) in the article, “The Role of Critical Reflection in Teacher Education” (Shandomo, 2010). In her article, she expounds on the concept of using reflective practices in many forms to enhance the theory-to-practice concept with preservice teachers. While she uses several methods of reflection in her classes, she found from her years of experience in using reflective projects that the primary benefit was a deeper understanding of their own teaching styles which encourages them to challenge current teaching practices (Shandomo, 2010).

The review of articles presented here helps to conclude that using reflective practices, and *visa vie* action research projects, during the preservice years encourages preservice teachers to not only evaluate their teaching effectiveness but challenges them to dig deeper into finding any learning gaps and meeting the needs of their students. Reexamination of pedagogy will further establish teacher effectiveness based on scientifically based information along with the tried-and-true methodology of theory to practice implementation which proves to engage students, enhance their learning, and increase student success.

As stated before, many forms of reflective teaching are associated with action research. Therefore, it is easily discerned that using action research while during their pre-service teaching time contributes to the understanding of pedagogical practices, empowers the pre-service teacher to examine how students learn using the current practices as well as permits them to make changes based on scientific data collected. The practices of reflection are exceptional in affording the pre-service teacher to connect the classroom concepts to actual teaching methods. How do we connect action research to the pre-service programs?

There are countless opportunities for pre-service teachers to use action research in their assignments as teacher candidates. One salient way is to have the pre-service teacher observe the mentor teacher’s strategies for teaching a specific subject matter. Then collaborate with the mentor teacher to identify and implement a different strategy for teaching that subject matter. The pre-service teacher would then collect the data to determine if that strategy was effective. Write up the data and share it with the mentor teacher to discuss ways to alter the strategy (if needed), re-implement the strategy, and collect new data. Having this type of assignment as part of the coursework gives pre-service teachers the opportunity to practice the art of reflective teaching in a guided manner. It also instills the act of reflecting not only on what they observe in their mentor teacher’s pedagogy but also helps them to reflect on their own beliefs and practices. Action research also demonstrates how reflective practices can be used to collaborate with their peers and provide professional development. All the while improving the pre-service teaching process of systematically going from theory to practice with the best student outcomes.

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Book Review: The Energy Bus: 10 Rules to Fuel Your Life, Work, and Team by Jon Gordon

By Shante Humphrey

Jon Gordon grew up in Long Island, NY, in a Jewish-Italian family. He did not have a positive household, and he often engaged in fights with the neighborhood kids. When this occurred, he felt like he was fighting for his life. After high school, he attended college at Cornell University. Here is where he learned about teamwork, culture, and leadership. Mr. Gordon went back and forth between law school and a dot-com job. He struggled at work and his team was collapsing. His family life was also falling apart due to stress. Gordon eventually ended up losing his job and did not know how he was going to provide for his family. His wife even began to question him, asking him where the man was she married. The real challenge came when she threatened to leave him. He blamed her for the tribulations he faced. Jon was the type of person who was constantly trying to prove himself to others and gain the valid status of being successful; this made him even more miserable. A life changing moment occurred in his life when he forgave his father for leaving him. This was the first step in letting go of his past.

Later on, Gordon became committed to serving and helping others. This was the beginning of turning his life around. He escaped a life of misery and depression by encouraging and inspiring individuals. It was the blueprint for his writings and speaking engagements. Years later, he is a distinguished speaker and author on positive attitude, and is passionate about the development of positive leaders, teams, and organizations. He believes that in order to get through challenging times, you have to have a positive attitude.

The *Energy Bus* was inspired by Jon Gordon's true experience when he met a bus driver who influenced him with wisdom and positive energy. There are powerful perceptions provided throughout the book to overcome adversity, as well as bring out the best in yourself and your team or organization. These perceptions are laid out in ten rules. These ten rules can be useful for anyone who wants to overcome challenges, build strong teams, and live a happy, satisfying life.

This book is for adults that get stuck in the negative cycles of life. It shows you how to change your work and personal relationships by becoming more positive. It also describes how anyone can turn their miserable life and negativity into a positive life of love, joy, and enthusiasm. Gordon takes readers on a motivating ride that reveals ten rules for approaching life and creating positive thinking that can lead to success. Through a fictional story, he states and describes these ten rules that he claims are necessary to create desired outcomes in life. They can be applied to life, work, and relationships.

Main Themes

The main theme of the *Energy Bus* is the power of positive energy and how it helps shape our lives and help us find happiness. It includes optimism, trust, enthusiasm, purpose, and passion. (pg. xv) Optimism is the principle that anything is possible; it drives people and businesses. It

creates jobs and drives new inventions. If you can believe, execute, and turn this belief into reality, you can change the world. (pg.68) Positive energy, along with vision, must be greater than doubt. Jon Gordon emphasizes the importance of creating and maintaining positive energy in one's life and work. He argues that this energy can help individuals and organizations can achieve their aspirations and conquer impediments. The main character, George, appears to have it all; a wonderful job, a family, and anything he could want, but he is unhappy and feels like he is losing control. The setbacks he come across make him question the meaning of life, until he meets Joy, the bus driver. She recognized his struggles and invited him on a voyage to a happier life and he accepted. George's experiences demonstrates how feeling out of control and hampered by stress can create unhappiness. The book emphasizes that taking control and having a vision can empower individuals to have the life they aspire to have.

Jon Gordon states you are the driver of your own bus; this is actually *Rule #1*. It simply means you are in control of your future. (pg. 26) Joy encourages George to take control of his life by being the driver of his own bus and He had to make decisions and choices about his life. He strongly feels that positive energy drives your bus onward, while negative energy obstructs your engine. As we go through life, we are tested. Challenges, adversity, and obstacles have to be defeated in order to be successful. Gordon believes that positive energy is the answer. Give yourself positive energy boosts throughout the day, so you can overcome negativity and motivate or energize others around you. (pg. 49)

Cheerful and purposeful living is another main focus of this book. The goal is to nurture an optimistic outlook, screen at those who drain your energy, and embrace positivism. Gordon continually emphasizes that positive results arise from positive people and positive teams. He also believes that Energy Vampires exist. These are people who drain your energy, and suck the life out of you, your goals, and vision. (pg.73) It is essential to identify and eliminate negativity. Positive energy can help you feel excited, energized, and optimistic about life. When that energy is negative, others feel it draining them; when it is positive, they feel elated. Gordon believes that the outcomes in life are not dependent on good and bad luck, or good and bad employees or family members. We are surrounded by different people, who emit different energies. You would often find yourself, as well as others, getting drawn towards those who give off positive energy while deterring those who generate negative energy.

The overall theme is that events + perception/positive energy = outcome. ($E+P=O$) (pg. 46) In other words, there are some things you cannot control, but what you can manage is how events are perceived. So, if you have positive thoughts, you can achieve better results. Maintaining positive energy as fuel is emphasized throughout the book. It suggests that negative energy can be transformed into positive energy by changing our perspective and focusing on gratitude.

Teamwork and communication are both important in achieving happiness in an individual's personal and professional life. Gordon emphasized that it is important to tell others about your life's vision and invite them with you on your journey; this is *Rule #4*. George realized that he could not succeed alone and that he needed the support of others. Joy introduced him to this concept, and he learns that the more people he has on his bus, the more positive energy he will have to fuel his ride and see results. This was put into practice when George created bus tickets for his team at work. He shared his vision with them and invited them to join him. This would create a positive and supportive environment, and lead to a successful journey. Gordon states that not everyone will be on board, but not to waste time on them. He reiterates that the more energy

you waste on those that do not share your vision and get on your bus, the less energy you will have for those that do come onboard. A positive team creates success.

The overall message for team leaders is that you have the power to control your team and it is up to you to point them in the right direction. Gordon argues that leadership is key in creating positive energy in an organization and emphasizes the importance of leaders setting the tone and creating optimism and positivity. A theme related to this idea is recognizing the importance of your team members by giving them time, recognizing them, and showing your appreciation. This will create strong and positive relationships. Gordon points out another interesting theme, and that is the importance of defining purpose and making work fun. Success is easier to achieve when employees are enjoying what they do.

The kind of energy you give off has an effect on whether others want you around. These feelings can inspire, uplift, or energize those you come in contact with, according to the author. You can also repel people by giving off negative energy. Gordon repeatedly stresses that the more positivity you are around, the happier you will be; you will have a better stance on life, and become a motivator for others. He also accentuates to not think negative thoughts and focus on the positive things in life.

Key Quotes

“Positive people, positive communication, positive interactions, and positive work and team cultures produce positive results.” (pg. xv) – This quote summarizes Gordon’s belief on positive energy. There comes a time when we feel like the weight of the world, our expectations, and our desires are on our shoulders. In order to achieve our best work and be the best that we can be, Gordon states we should reframe our thinking towards positivity. By choosing to focus on the positive aspects of our lives and surround ourselves with positive people, we can create a successful and fulfilling life.

“Always remember that you are the driver of your own bus...if you don’t take responsibility for your life and control of your bus then you can’t take it where you want to go.” (pg. 26) – We are continuously reminded of this throughout the book. You are in the driver’s seat. Once you take control of the wheel, you are taking control of your life. The kind of ride your bus has is up to you. You create your life, and a vision needs to be developed to determine where you are going.

“There is an energy to thought and when you identify what you desire and write down your vision, you begin the process of mobilizing the energy to create the life you want.” (pg. 35) – Here, Gordon states that you have to look inward to create the life you want. First, you have to perceive things the way they are. In other words, understand where you are in life at the present moment. Secondly, imagine the life you want to create. Remember the regrets and the accomplishments, and visualize them as goals. Decide you want it more than anything, proceed with it, on and believe you can accomplish it. Write your vision down because it will remind you of your goals, and you will also see how far you have come.

“Every crisis offers an opportunity to grow stronger and wiser; to reach deep within and discover a better you that will create a better outcome.” (pg. 40) – Gordon encourages readers to embrace a positive mindset and accept obstacles as opportunities to grow. We have to

acknowledge challenges as being short-term setbacks . Once we do this, we can prevail over adversity and achieve our goals.

“No one creates success in a vacuum and the people we surround ourselves with have a big influence on the life and success we create.” (pg. 73) – Gordon states that the people that surrounds us determine if we are successful or not.

“Your positive energy and vision must be greater than anyone’s and everyone’s negativity. Your certainty must be greater than everyone’s doubt.” (pg. 77) – With this quote, Gordon emphasizes the importance of having a positive mindset when faced with negativity and doubt. In order to achieve our goal, we must be optimistic. We have to believe in ourselves and embrace positivity; thus, turning challenges into opportunities for growth and success.

“Purpose is the ultimate fuel that moves you towards your vision.” (pg. 131) – Gordon believes this is necessary for your journey. Knowing your purpose keeps you focused and energized. It is imperative to have a well-defined vision and devotion in life. By identifying what is important to us, setting goals, and reminding ourselves of our purpose, we can stay motivated and committed to achieving our vision.

“Remember, you have only one ride through life so give it all you got and enjoy the ride.” (pg. 164) – Gordon points out that we only have one life to live, and life is short. So, we should try to live it to the fullest and enjoy it. Decide what is important to you; do what makes you happy and everything else will fall into place.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Jon Gordon’s book is one of the many that stresses the idea of positive energy; it is an advocate for positive energy. *The Energy Bus* encourages you to be optimistic about life and be positive. It is an easy book to read that you can probably finish in one day. The ten rules listed are actually inspiring and motivates you. They guide you on how use energy to have a meaningful life. This book is also great for employers and employees because it encourages productivity, creativity, and teamwork.

Although this book is inspirational and a motivating, it forces the idea that anyone who does not believe in “positivity” are “energy vampires” and should be terminated from their place of employment. It is forcing positivity onto people and pushing out those who disagree. Gordon makes you believe that all problems are sources from negativity, and anything can be repaired with positivity. This undermines problems like mental illnesses, such as anxiety or depression. These disorders cannot be magically corrected by saying that positive energy attracts positive things. It is not easy for those suffering from mental illnesses to shake negative thoughts. This book is also repetitive. Gordon’s main ideas are repeated throughout the book in different ways, but they all mean the same.

Comparison to Fullan

Fullan’s *Leading in a Culture of Change* and *The Energy Bus* by Jon Gordon, both advocate that before creating change in others, you must start from within. Leaders from both prospectives state that you have to believe in yourself before you can lead others to change.

Leadership is not based on a one size fit all solution to anything. However, it is based on morals, purpose, and attitude. How will you create an environment of change in a culture? As a leader, you can demand changes based on your authority. However, according to Fullan, those kinds of changes are not lasting changes because there was no buy in from the staff. In order for change to truly happen, the people working for you or under you have to understand why the change is happening and share the same vision. In Michael Fullan's *Leading a Culture of Change*, it teaches you strategies to be a great leader or run a phenomenal company. This is done in 5 core competencies: moral purpose, understanding change, building relationships, creating and sharing knowledge, and creating coherence. These five competencies are supposed to help you become a more effective leader. Whether you are leading a company, school, or district, they will help you achieve effective leadership.

Fullan believes that moral purpose is valuable and exists in a form that can be developed and brought to life. It is natural, but it needs to be nurtured by leaders to grow. Secondly, understanding change, is the hardest concept to grasp. We never want things to change and never understand why it has to, yet change is inevitable in the world we live in. This essentially means that building meaningful relationships are important no matter where you are. The better the relationship between you and the people around you, the more successful you are. Another valuable tool is creating a collaborative culture through workshops, peer groups or even observation groups. According to Fullan, an organization must emphasize knowledge sharing as a responsibility and provide opportunities and incentives for people to participate in it. When new interactions and ideas cause the organization to transition into a new state, this leads to an increased coherence. Fullan believes these are the ways to create success in a dynamic world.

The *Energy Bus* is a book that gives life principles for success. The energy you project is the energy that you will receive in return. It explores the idea that there is no success is negativity. This book focuses on ten guidelines for turning positive thoughts and energies into desired life outcomes. Anyone who wishes to overcome obstacles, form effective teams, and lead a happy, satisfying life can benefit from these ideas. This book also explores principals about life that in turn helps you become a better leader.. The principles that Gordon speaks about in his book are easy to understand and are straightforward. If you master these principles, you will be successful no matter where you are or who your with.

In Gordon's *The Energy Bus*, it states that "you can take your bus anywhere you want it to go." This simply means the vision is yours, your attitude will determine the success of your vision. The energy you give will be the energy you get in return. In Fullan's *Leading in a Culture of Change*, he addresses the framework that makes a successful leader. Both *The Energy Bus* and *Leading a Culture of Change* emphasize that relationships with the people you work with can make or break your organization. It is important to build a rapport with colleagues in a positive way, which will help to strengthen the foundation of the organization. However, both books emphasize the most important theme, which is positive relationship building. To be an effective leader, you must form positive relationships with those you are responsible for leading; they must include those who are willing to follow and share your vision.

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Book Review: Nonverbal Learning Disorders: A School and Life Perspective

By Florencia Pecorari

Abstract

This book review provides an overview and evaluation of "Nonverbal Learning Disorders: A School and Life Perspective" by Gloria Hash. The review highlights the increasing prevalence of Nonverbal Learning Disorder (NLD) among students and the lack of understanding from teachers and parents. The book aims to address this gap by offering explanations of NLD and coping strategies targeted at parents, teachers, administrators, and students. By promoting collaborative reading and discussions, the book empowers NLD students to make informed choices and achieve academic, social, and emotional growth. While the book explores the developmental trajectory of NLD and offers valuable insights into its characteristics, it contrasts with public school mandates on cursive writing instruction. Despite its clear organization and insightful examples, the review notes a lack of deeper exploration into the interrelation between educational and home environments for NLD students. Overall, the book enhances awareness and understanding of NLD, making it a valuable resource for supporting individuals affected by this condition.

Book Review

Title: Nonverbal Learning Disorders: A School and Life Perspective

Author: Gloria Hash Marcus

Bibliography: Gloria Hash Marcus, Greenville, SC. 29615 Pages 181. \$ 18,95

“She is a highly experienced Licensed Psychoeducational Specialist, Licensed Professional Counselor, and Nationally Certified School Psychologist with 48 years of expertise. She has worked extensively in various roles within school systems, developmental pediatric clinics, psychiatric hospitals, and state mental health agencies. Marcus specializes in assessing and treating learning disabilities, dyslexia, Nonverbal Learning Disorders (NLD), and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). She writes this book to bring NLD knowledge and hope to students, teachers and parents.”

Nonverbal Learning Disorders: A School and Life Perspective

“Nonverbal Learning Disorder Students are rarely understood by their teachers and parents”

This book addresses the increasing prevalence of NLD among students and the lack of understanding from teachers and parents. It offers explanations of NLD and coping strategies, intended for parents, teachers, administrators, and students. By promoting collaborative reading

between parents and children and facilitating group discussions among educators, the book aims to empower NLD students to make informed choices and achieve academic, social, and emotional growth. It seeks to bring hope and freedom to individuals with NLD and their families.

The subject of the book is Nonverbal Learning Disorder and its impact on individuals' lives, particularly in school settings. It delves into the characteristics, challenges, and experiences associated with NLD, offering insights and strategies for addressing the needs of individuals with this condition. The book also explores the broader implications of NLD in various aspects of life, aiming to increase understanding and support for those affected by it.

The theme of "Nonverbal Learning Disorders: A School and Life Perspective" revolves around understanding and addressing the challenges faced by individuals with Nonverbal Learning Disorders (NLD) in both educational settings and everyday life. It explores the complexities of NLD, sheds light on its often-misunderstood nature, and offers coping strategies to empower individuals with NLD and those who support them.

The book provides comprehensive insight into NLD, offering explanations of its symptoms, behaviors, and impacts on academic, social, and emotional functioning. Gloria Hash says "For NLD Students the ability to understand and apply the construct of "cause and effect is often disrupted" pg.20. The book aims to bridge the gap in understanding between parents, educators, and students themselves regarding NLD, fostering collaboration and promoting effective strategies for supporting individuals with NLD in various contexts.

The thesis of the book is encapsulated in the author's intention to bring awareness and understanding to the phenomenon of NLD, which is often overlooked or misunderstood. While providing information also gives tips and cues to teachers and parents like "This is a powerful tool for teachers: the NLD written production often does not match his or her ability in verbal expression" pg. 27. By providing practical guidance and strategies, the book seeks to empower individuals with NLD to navigate their academic, social, and emotional experiences with greater confidence and success. "Teachers play key roles in any evaluation but specially in an evaluation for NLD" pg. 44. Specific strategies and paths are explained to guide the students or adults with NLD, like it says in the book "NLD student needs to be explicitly thought a structures script" pg. 67. It is very important to express the intensive and detailed explanation that involves the Social and Emotional concerns of the students with NLD, this book explain and give also a range of therapies and resources that guide the students, parents and teachers as well, one touched phrase from the author is "Over the years I have consistently found that expressive therapy techniques are as powerful as talk therapy". Pg.114. Through collaborative efforts among parents, educators, and professionals, the book aims to illuminate the path toward a more supportive and inclusive environment for individuals with NLD, fostering hope and freedom in their journey towards personal growth and fulfillment.

The book offers valuable insights into the developmental trajectory of individuals affected by this condition. It begins by highlighting early signs of NLD in children, emphasizing delays in motor skills development and a preference for verbal activities over physical ones. However, a notable contrast arises when discussing writing strategies. While the book advocates for initiating cursive writing instruction in the early years of elementary school to address the needs of students with NLD, this approach contrasts with public school mandates, which may prioritize

other forms of writing instruction. This discrepancy in recommended strategies may influence the future decisions and expectations of students with NLD regarding their academic goals and experiences. Additionally, the chapter delves into the challenges faced by children with NLD as they progress through preschool and kindergarten, where motor issues become more apparent and affect tasks like dressing and engaging in physical activities. Despite these challenges, language and verbal fluency remain areas of strength, often leading to placement in gifted programs. However, as children enter elementary school, they may experience interpersonal disconnects despite their academic achievements, highlighting the disparity between verbal expression and written production. This incongruity serves as a significant indicator for teachers to identify students who may benefit from additional support.

The book on NLD presents strengths and weaknesses in its approach to informing parents and educators about the condition's characteristics. One of the book's strong points is its clear organization, which allows readers to navigate through the material effectively. I appreciated the inclusion of examples related to social and emotional concerns and the thorough explanation of therapeutic interventions. These elements provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by individuals with NLD and how to support them effectively. However, while the book promises a "School and Life Perspective" in its title, I found that it could have delved deeper into the interrelation between the educational and home environments of students with NLD. Although the author explains the implications of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and Section 504 accommodations, I was expecting more exploration of how these plans translate into the everyday life of the student outside of the school setting. Despite this limitation, reading the book left me more aware and informed about NLD, making it a valuable resource for anyone seeking to understand and support individuals with this condition.

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Book Review: What Great Principals Do Differently: 18 Things That Matter Most

By Nori Llizo

Abstract

The book "What Great Principals Do Differently: 18 Things that Matter Most" by Todd Whitaker is summarized in this abstract. The review delves into the goal of the book, which is to analyze the traits and actions of effective school principals and provide guidance to enable constructive change for both students and schools. According to Whitaker's thesis, exceptional principals have particular traits and follow particular practices that make them stand out. The book gives readers a thorough grasp of the main themes and objectives covered in Whitaker's work by outlining 18 crucial concepts that stand in for crucial behaviors for effective school leadership.

Book Review: What Great Principals Do Differently: 18 Things That Matter Most Purpose and Thesis of Book

This review centers on Todd Whitaker's book, What Great Principals Do Differently: 18 Things that Matter Most. The purpose of the book is to examine the traits and actions of successful school principals, as well as to provide insights and guidance to make a positive impact on their school and students. The thesis of the book is that exceptional principals possess certain characteristics and follow particular practices that distinguish them from their colleagues. Whitaker lists a number of crucial ideas that effective principals constantly exhibit. The thesis focuses on 18 specific practices or behaviors that Whitaker believes are essential for effective school leadership. It provides context so readers can comprehend the main themes and goals of the book.

Main Themes

According to Todd Whitaker, what principals do determine their caliber, not their level of degree, experience, or even their academic standing. The book outlines 18 key principles (themes) that can assist leaders refine their skills and set great principals apart. The following are several of the key themes I consider to be the most beneficial to be an effective school leader:

Why Look at Great? This theme focuses on learning from effective leaders. The point is to concentrate on leaders who know how to navigate the world of leadership, who have demonstrated effectiveness in their roles. It is important to study successful principals to grasp new ideas to build on. Look at the great things they are doing, such as achieving positive outcomes, creating a conducive learning environment, and demonstrating effective leadership practices. Whitaker (2012) suggests that instead of focusing on principals' errors, the focus

should be directed on the positive aspects of what they are doing. This change in perspective is necessary for a productive learning process. Rather than just teaching people what not to do, the focus is on helping them understand and apply effective leadership techniques.

It's People, Not Programs: This theme suggests the idea that it is the quality of teachers and staff that determines the quality of the school. The success of a school is viewed as a reflection of the competence, dedication, and effectiveness of its teaching and administrative team. It is important to see the school as a community and not as a program of small groups. Building this community is key to improving the quality of a great school. This perspective emphasizes the importance of fostering a sense of unity and collaboration among teachers, staff, and students. This theme also includes the effectiveness of having an open classroom policy, assertive discipline, offering opportunities for professional growth to teachers, and the results of knowing when to use rewards or penalties.

Develop an Accurate Sense of Self: This theme highlights the universal desire to be known and respected by those around you. How do leaders identify when they are well known and respected by their colleagues? Well, leaders have to first have a sense of self. The author encourages self-awareness and a deep understanding of the type of leader one aspires to be. Effective principals reflect on their leadership style, values, and priorities. A proficient principal will know the answer to the following questions: Can I always make myself available to speak to teachers and staff? How attuned am I with understanding and recognizing my perception of effectiveness? How open am I to feedback from teachers? Do I encourage confidence within the teachers and staff? If a principal is able to answer these questions, they are on the road to being a successful principal who can lead with poise.

Who is the Variable? This theme asserts that effective principals can identify who the key variable in the classroom is. In this setting, the “variable” refers to the factor that can change and influence outcomes within the classroom. Smart principals understand that the most significant factor in the classroom is not necessarily what is being taught but who is involved in the education process, meaning the teacher. Excellent educators hold themselves to an even higher standard than they do for their students. This same point applies to principals. What distinguishes great principals from average ones is what they demand of themselves. In other words, the commitment to excellence, self-improvement, and a high standard of performance is a key factor that sets outstanding principals apart.

Treat Everyone with Respect, Every Day, All the Time: This theme revolves around the idea that an effective principal plays a crucial role in creating and shaping a positive atmosphere in school. Specific actions that contribute to creating a positive learning environment include practicing respect, offering authentic praise, and maintaining dignity. Respectful and dignified behavior from the principal sets a tone for the entire school community. Whitaker (2012) states that people will side with you if you react appropriately and professionally at all times. This makes upholding one's high-level dignity at all times, especially when things get tough, an essential skill. Successful principals possess this ability. Also, proficient principals are aware that they have the power to bring about positive changes in their schools. They understand their influence and actively work towards improvements and enhancements within the school.

Be the Filter: This theme suggests that successful principals are aware that they serve as a filter for the day-to-day operations of their school. This implies that principals have the power to influence and shape the daily experiences of teachers, staff, and students, based on their actions and decisions. Their actions set the tone for teachers, staff, students, and families. The principal's behavior and decisions serve as a model that others within the school are likely to follow. An effective principal has significant impact in their school. Their focus becomes the school's focus, indicating that the principal's priorities and vision shape the collective direction of the school. In order to make this happen, they must create credibility and good relationships. Effective principals should focus on the matters that are important and filter out minor annoyances.

Teach the Teachers: This theme summarizes the importance of being a true leader. The students are the most significant individuals in the school. Nonetheless, exceptional principals understand that their main responsibility is to teach and mentor the teachers, so that they can provide a positive and impactful learning experience for students. Having outstanding teachers is the best way to give students an amazing learning environment. Excellent principals prioritize teachers in order to prioritize students. In other words, an effective principal will share their knowledge, be hands-on, and be present in the classrooms assisting the teachers. In addition, they will invest in the professional development and support of teachers as a strategic approach to enhance the overall educational experience for students.

Hire Great Teachers: This theme addresses the importance of hiring outstanding teachers for the improvement of a school. One of the most important strategies for quickly improving a school is to hire and retain teachers who are superior to the departing ones. Smart principals are aware of this and take great care to select only the most qualified educators. It is easy for principals to wonder how to share the enthusiasm and energy of their newly hired dynamic teachers with the other teachers, and this is why great principals have a different goal: to have the school become more like the new teachers. This suggests a desire to integrate the positive qualities and approaches of outstanding educators into the broader school culture.

Understand the Dynamics of Change: This theme highlights the fast-paced which education is constantly changing at. Understanding new laws, new expectations, and frequent state and federal changes are all part of the job for school administrators. In addition, principals also have their own ideas, objectives, and goals. So how does an effective principal grip the changes? They stay informed and look beyond the storm. This means that effective principals do not get overwhelmed by the challenges and uncertainties brought about by changes but instead maintain a forward-looking perspective. They look for the positive in the changes to come and clearly communicate with teachers and staff about the changes.

Standardized Testing: This theme explores standardized testing and indicates that it is a central aspect of discussion or concern within the educational field. The opinions of principals regarding standardized testing vary. However, principals have to deal with the reality of these tests, regardless of their beliefs. A smart principal possesses a certain level of strategic understating of the importance of test preparation. While acknowledging the importance of standardized testing, a smart principal is also aware that standardized testing is only one component of the school. This is a key point that emphasizes the multifaceted nature of education and the various elements that contribute to the overall success and identity of a school.

Focus on Behavior, Then Focus on Beliefs: This theme introduces a strategic approach to leadership, suggesting a sequential focus on behavior before beliefs. This suggests that the focus should initially be on observable behaviors rather than directly addressing deeply ingrained beliefs. A smart principal recognizes and understands how hard it is to alter someone's deep-rooted beliefs. They also know that behavioral changes inherently result in beliefs changing as well. Therefore, principals should encourage positive behavioral changes throughout their school. For example, not all teachers share the belief of praising students. A clever principal will take proactive steps to address this by teaching the teachers the techniques to properly praise students and allow them to see the positive results of praising. Once teachers witness the positive results of praising students, they will begin to believe that praise can be beneficial to students and the classroom environment.

Set Expectation at the Start of the Year: This theme mentions the thrill of starting a new school year and the chances it offers to introduce adjustments and reestablish expectations. Effective principals use the beginning of the year as an opportunity to set the tone for the school and, more significantly, for the academic year. Expectations are to be communicated in a transparent manner to teachers and students. Also, effective principals recognize the importance of the initial phase of the school year, not just for the beginning but also for shaping the trajectory of the academic year. It suggests that the actions taken at the start have a lasting impact on the educational journey that follows. The start of classes presents a fresh chance to advance both the teachers and the students.

Key Quotes

“When you want to be good at what you do, asking for guidance counts as a sign of strength.” (Pg. 18) This statement suggests that asking for help is a good and admirable quality, particularly when one wants to succeed in their undertakings.

“As a matter of fact, if we praise correctly, it is impossible to praise too much.” (Pg. 29) This statement advises that praise can be a motivating factor without running the risk of being overdone if it is given thoughtfully and genuinely.

“Consciously or not, you decide how to end any meeting. Your decision to end on a positive note will send others to their next challenge with energy and enthusiasm.” (Pg. 37) This statement implies that a positive conclusion can have a motivating effect, fostering a more optimistic and productive mindset as individuals move on to their next tasks.

“If we want them to do better, we must help them improve their skills and master new ones.” (Pg. 41) This phrase expresses the idea that helping teachers learn and acquire new skills is crucial if we want them to perform better or produce better outcomes.

“Highly effective principals understand their importance as role models.” (Pg. 59) According to the statement, principals who are highly effective are not only capable leaders but also aware of how their actions affect other people. Their actions are guided by the awareness that they are role models, which helps to create a positive and impactful leadership style in the school.

“Great principals keep standardized testing in perspective and focus on the real issue of student learning.” (Pg. 70) This statement proposes that exceptional or great principals maintain a balanced perspective regarding standardized testing and prioritize the fundamental issue of student learning.

“The most effective principals have the confidence to seek input in advanced and feedback after the fact.” (Pg. 83) This statement means that the most effective principals possess the confidence to proactively seek input or advice before making decisions and are also open to receiving feedback after actions have been taken.

“Before making any decision or attempting to bring about any change, great principals ask themselves one central question: What will my best teachers think of this?” (Pg. 87) This phrase proposes that before making decisions or initiating changes, great principals consider the perspective of their most effective or skilled teachers.

“The principals are the architects. The teachers establish the foundation. The students move into the building and fill it with life and meaning.” (Pg. 141) This phrase implies that principals are seen as the ones who design and shape the educational environment, setting the tone, goals, and direction of the school, teachers play a foundational role in the educational process, providing the essential knowledge, skills, and support that students need to build upon, and students enter the learning environment and contribute their unique experiences, perspectives, and energy, bringing vibrancy and significance to the educational space.

“Every principal has an impact. Great principals make a difference.” (Pg. 141) This statement infers that every school principal, regardless of their effectiveness, has an impact on the school environment. However, it particularly emphasizes that great principals, those who excel in their roles, make a significant and positive difference.

Weak Points

The book does not delve sufficiently into the topic of cultural sensitivity and diversity. Offering more direction in this area would be beneficial since schools are occupied with students of different demographic backgrounds. The book lacks practical insights, strategies, and guidance for school leaders on how to address and navigate cultural diversity effectively. Effective leadership in educational settings requires an awareness of and respect for various cultures. Being an effective leader calls for a deeper understanding of and proficiency navigating the cultural dynamics inherent in diverse student populations, going beyond simple administrative abilities.

Strong Points

The author, Todd Whitaker wrote the book from three different perspectives. The first perspective was from a researcher’s viewpoint. He took part in numerous research projects, all of which were based on trips to schools with and without strong principals. He was able to learn what outstanding principals do that other principals do not by using this method. The second perspective was from a consultant viewpoint. Whitaker collaborated with over fifty schools annually. Through his observations in these schools and his interactions with principals, faculty,

students, and staff, he was able to obtain valuable insights into successful practices. The last perspective was from a personal viewpoint. He discusses in his writing the fundamental beliefs that have shaped his career as a principal. Writing from these three different perspectives offers a magnitude of insights and provides solid evidence of the practices he suggests build an effective principal.

Comparison to Fullan

Although they take distinct approaches to the subject, Todd Whitaker's "What Great Principals Do Differently: 18 Things That Matter" and Michael Fullan's "Leading in a Culture of Change" both concentrate on educational leadership. Both books provide leaders with useful tips and techniques. Fullan talks about the challenges of change and how leaders can handle it effectively. Along with addressing systemic issues, he also focuses on leadership within a culture of change in relation to the larger educational landscape. Whitaker on the other hand, offers 18 concrete suggestions for what exceptional principals do differently. He focuses more on specific actions and qualities of individual effective principals. Fullan provides theories, knowledge bases, ideas, and strategies, *A Framework for Leadership*, to assist in solving challenging issues. Whitaker, while grounded in useful guidance, emphasizes concrete behaviors and actions and is more targeted and actionable. Both books offer insightful viewpoints on educational leaderships. Both, a must read for aspiring school administrators!

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