Reflections on Teaching and Learning,” this review focuses on three publications on effective literacy education in the service of learners: *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction* (3rd edition), *Best Practices in Adolescent Literacy Instruction*, and *Best Practices in Writing Instruction*.

**Best Practices in Literacy Instruction, 3rd edition**
Edited by Linda B. Gambrell, Leslie Mandel Morrow, and Michael Pressley

**Review by Kevin Koziol, Boston College, Boston University**

*Best Practices in Literacy Instruction* is a wide-ranging and versatile compilation of descriptions of current research, theory, and practice regarding the literacy needs of K–12 students. As the call for “evidence-based practice” continues to drive conversations about literacy instruction, this book serves as a comprehensive and authoritative resource for classroom teachers, administrators, and pre-service teachers interested in supporting students’ learning by adopting practices that are informed by the most up-to-date research and theory. It is also a valuable and timely resource for anyone wishing to stay abreast of a rapidly evolving field.

The book is divided into five parts. Part 1, “Perspectives on Best Practices,” establishes a particular perspective on literacy and literacy instruction through a sketch of the central ideas that run through the book. Part II, “Best Practices for All Students,” takes up questions about literacy support for groups of students with particular literacy needs. Part III, “Evidence-Based Strategies for Literacy Learning and Teaching,” addresses the instructional implications of specific reading processes, as well as those involved in writing and assessment. Part IV, “Perspectives on Special Issues,” explores timely opportunities and issues related to literacy instruction and professional development. Finally, Part V, “Future Directions,” provides a reflection on the message and role of this book. Each chapter contains, in addition to the text, an advance organizer covering major points and “engagement activities” that allow readers to reflect upon and apply key concepts and approaches.

**Part 1: Perspectives on Best Practices**

The two strong initial chapters comprising Part 1 clarify some of the central themes and concepts in the book. In Chapter 1, “Evidence-Based Practices,” Linda B. Gambrell, Jacquelyn A. Malloy, and Susan Anders Mazzoni identify and describe ten fundamental instructional practices generally acknowledged to support student literacy development given today’s increasingly multi-faceted demands. These practices are framed by two ideas that form central themes in the subsequent chapters of the book—“comprehensive literacy instruction” and “teachers as visionary decision makers.” In describing comprehensive literacy, Gambrell et al. suggest that representing the realities of attaining literacy today warrants a broad definition that includes “the personal, intellectual, and social nature of literacy” (p. 14). The instructional implications of this definition include, for instance, increased attention to students’ independence in using comprehension strategies meaningfully and effectively, the use of students’ prior knowledge as foundational to the instructional process, and the employment of responsive differentiated instructional approaches. Correspondingly, it has become vital to recognize and understand the increasingly complex and central role of the teacher in facilitating students’ literacy development. As visionary decision makers, teachers rely upon a unique blend of knowledge of evidence-based literacy practices, the classroom context, and their students’ lives to provide efficacious instruction. With designated “evidence-based practices” becoming increasingly valued, Gambrell et al. suggest that this view of teacher thinking raises an important qualification to the exploration of the best practices offered in this book—“they can be described—but not prescribed” (italics in original, p. 16).

In Chapter 2, “Balance in Comprehensive Literacy Instruction,” P. David Pearson, Taffy E. Raphael, Vicki L. Benson, and Christina L. Mada offer a contemporary definition of balanced literacy consistent with the notion of comprehensive literacy instruction described in Chapter 1. After providing a concise historical overview of the concept of “balance” in literacy curricula and instruction, Pearson et al. suggest that the once dominant framing of a code-based–meaning-based continuum in reading instruction is now inadequate and apt to bring about oversimplified balanced literacy instructional approaches. They suggest that this conceptual limitation offers little meaningful direction for contending with the mounting evidence of the so-called “achievement gap” and consistent low-quality literacy support for non-mainstream students. Accordingly, a reconceptualization of balance is in order. For Pearson et al., balanced literacy instruction is structured by a framework consisting of two broadband distinctions, “contextual” and “content” continua, and eleven subcontinua meant to represent the separate (though related) instructional elements. The implications of this framework are exemplified through a description of two elementary literacy
programs that demonstrate the interrelatedness and changeable positioning that occur when the continua are flexibly applied in the classroom. This chapter, like its antecedent, provides a well-structured and clear guide for exploring the rest of this book.

Part II: Best Practices for All Students
Part II consists of four chapters describing best practices for preschool and early elementary students, struggling readers, English Language Learners, and adolescents—groups that traditionally have particular instructional needs. Chapter 3, “Best Practices in Early Literacy Development in Preschool, Kindergarten, and First Grade,” by Lesley Mandel Morrow and Diane H. Tracey, focuses on describing high-quality classrooms that support emergent and early literacy. After making the case for the developmental importance of early literacy experiences for children, they focus on two key programmatic features drawn from Schickedanz’s (2004) analysis of state literacy standards. Quality early literacy programs, they suggest, orient practices toward students’ oral language development and literacy development. The chapter continues with a day-in-the-life account of an exemplary kindergarten classroom that illustrates the instructional practices that can be derived from the program elements. While readers are left to make their own connections between theory and practice, this chapter serves as an accessible resource and makes a convincing argument for the importance of early literacy experiences as part of a comprehensive educational program.

In Chapter 4, “Struggling Readers,” Richard L. Allington and Kim Baker raise questions about how best to support students who have difficulty in acquiring literacy. Using the notion of “intervention all day long” (p. 85) they contend that individually tailored reading instruction for struggling readers must extend beyond time spent with specialists into the general classroom environment. In carrying this out, it is important that these students receive instructional support primarily from skilled teachers instead of principally from paraprofessionals, whose work, Allington and Baker suggest, has demonstrated limited, if any, benefit for at-risk readers. The chapter concludes with a description of two teachers who typify the delivery of exemplary classroom instruction. This section presents a reasonable justification for expanding expert instruction for struggling students and provides rich exemplars. Allington and Baker also include a reference list that documents many of the evidence-based practices used to support struggling readers.

Chapter 5, “Best Practices for Literacy Instruction for English-Language Learners,” by Maria S. Carlo focuses on the critical importance of supporting the English Language Learner’s literacy development through both foundational skill instruction and continued exposure to rich oral and written English-language contexts. Using the components of reading and reading instruction presented by the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000), she describes the particular needs of students with limited English proficiency in developing phonological awareness, alphabetic knowledge, word identification skills, and vocabulary (for more on supporting vocabulary development for English Language Learners see Carlo, et al., 2004, this issue). Vocabulary learning is of particular importance for literacy. Evoking now conventional wisdom regarding the ways that reading skills can exponentially differentiate students’ access to content and the way superficial language knowledge and usage can mask structural misunderstandings (see also, Stanovich, 1986, this issue; Cummins, 1979), Carlo suggests that students’ vocabulary development depends upon understanding the subtleties and complexities of English syntax and semantics supported through instruction in a “rich” language environment that involves high-quality oral communication and shared read-alouds. Facilitative practices, illustrated by ongoing research efforts, include employing picture walks, teaching English orthography using picture aids, and using cognates to highlight language similarities and differences.

Part II concludes with Donna Ogle and Laura Lang’s “Best Practices in Adolescent Literacy Instruction.” They present a strong case for scaling-up literacy support from the classroom to the building level in middle and high schools. School-wide collaboration and consistent program implementation are among the structural features of successful programs. Ogle and Lang also suggest that, with regard to instruction, fostering students’ metacognition through comprehension strategy instruction, supporting them in becoming self-reflective readers, and enhancing their motivation to read and write are among the critical instructional goals for teachers of adolescent learners. The chapter ends with a return to key school-wide programmatic features, which are exemplified through a case description.

Part III: Evidence-Based Strategies for Literacy Learning and Teaching
Part III presents six chapters that separate and describe central elements of literacy and literacy instruction. Taken together, they provide a useful heuristic for understanding the way that comprehensive literacy instruction might be accomplished—what it might “look like,” so to speak. As in Chapter 5, the first four chapters correspond to the framework of the components of reading and reading instruction put forth by the NRP (2000). They describe recent research evidence and best practices for each of the five components: Phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The final two chapters address writing instruction and assessment, respectively. Within this book, Part III may be of most immediate interest to current K–12 practitioners concerned with incorporating current research-based practices into their teaching. As is to be expected, the bulk of the information in this part focuses on children in the early elementary grades.

Chapters 7 through 10, which include the components of reading and reading instruction, are structured consistently. They each open with an update of recent research and evidence and proceed to a description of instructional practices. This organization provides for clear and straightforward reading, allowing the four chapters to be read, fittingly, as a single unit. Chapter 7, “Best
Practices in Teaching Phonological Awareness and Phonics," by Patricia M. Cunningham, outlines the current state of research evidence and debate concerning phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, and multisyllabic decoding along with their respective significance in the process of becoming literate. She emphasizes (or rather, re-emphasizes) the strong relationship between a child’s level of phonemic awareness and later reading proficiency, as well as the effectiveness of systematic instruction in general. Cunningham cautions, however, about using this evidence to narrow the curriculum of early literacy programs, either in the direction of single approaches to supporting phonemic awareness development or toward the exclusion of other essential emergent literacy skills altogether (e.g., print tracking, purposes of reading/writing, emergent writing activities, etc.). After a somewhat limited justification for multisyllabic decoding instruction in later elementary grades, the chapter concludes with three rich examples of the practices in the classroom context.

Similarly structured, “Best Practices in Vocabulary Instruction” by Camille L. Z. Blachowicz and Peter J. Fisher begins with an outline of five guidelines for effective vocabulary instruction synthesized from the NRP report and the Handbook of Reading Research, Volume II (edited by Barr, Kamili, Rosenthal, and Pearson, 1991). The five guidelines stipulate, respectively, the creation of “word-rich” classrooms, development of student independence in vocabulary acquisition, employment of teacher modeling, use of “explicit” instructional approaches, and coordination of assessment methods with the two broad instructional goals of developing “depth” and “breadth.” Drawing on research evidence and corresponding instructional implications, Blachowicz and Fisher devote the largest part of the chapter to making a persuasive case for the importance of the guidelines. This scope, however, incurs a cost as the chapter concludes with an all too brief description of vocabulary instruction in a fourth-grade classroom to exemplify the guidelines in practice.

In Chapter 9, “Best Practices in Fluency Instruction,” Melanie R. Kuhn and Timothy Rasinski explore ways to support fluency for typically developing and struggling readers. After offering a clear and succinct description of automatic word recognition and prosodic reading, two fundamental processes for fluency development, they proceed to a discussion of six research-based approaches to fluency instruction linked to Rasinski’s (2003) instructional principles. The specific approaches—Reading-While-Listening, Paired Repeated Readings, Authentic Repeated Reading, Fluency Oriented Oral Reading, The Fluency Development Lesson, and Assessing Fluency—are presented with connections to research evidence and classroom implications. Taken together, these approaches amalgamate key elements of fluency support in practice. Taken separately, they provide individual examples of fluency interventions at different levels of intensity—from the isolated (yet systematic) use of partnered reading to the adoption of the Fluency Development Lesson and/or Fast Start, more formalized interventions. Kuhn and Rasinski conclude by posing a number of as yet unresolved questions concerning the relationship between prosody and developing comprehension, the efficacy of repetition, the impact of text difficulty, and the role of the teacher. Research aimed at addressing these issues has and will continue to have important instructional implications.

The sequence of chapters directly focusing on the NRP’s components of reading and reading instruction ends with “Best Practices in Teaching Comprehension” by Cathy Collins Block and Michael Pressley. Drawing upon the evolving research base on proficient readers, they argue that accepted assumptions about comprehension instruction should now be revised to reflect more accurately the complexity of the reading processes at work. After introducing a nuanced and language-based framework of practice to meet this need, they provide a concise, accessible, and useful summary of major advances in the knowledge base on comprehension instruction. Block and Pressley then describe specific research-based comprehension strategies through a generic lesson format that provides a versatile organizational structure for designing instruction in the early grades. They devote considerable attention to identifying three elements that should be consistent in comprehension instruction: multiple comprehension strategies in one lesson, small-group instruction (to increase instructional capacity), and different approaches for fictional and informational texts. Remaining committed to an evidence-based appraisal of comprehension instruction, Block and Pressley have produced an impressive, accessible resource in this section.

The final two chapters in Part III take up questions about writing instruction and literacy assessment. In “Best Practices in Teaching Writing,” Karen Bromley distinguishes three features of K–8 writing programs grounded in evidence-based practices. First, she identifies contextual features—material, interpersonal, and intrapersonal—present in successful writing programs. Next, she untangles some of the complexity of writing instruction through a discussion of “intentionality,” using two teachers’ classrooms to exemplify the balance between direct writing instruction and workshop approaches. Finally, in a section on writing assessment she provides a valuable perspective on student involvement, along with usable resources. Given the current popularity of assessment-driven or “backward” (e.g., Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) approaches to curriculum design, this final section has particular relevance.

Part III ends with “Literacy Assessment” by Peter Afflerbach who argues that our current understanding of reading has, in effect, outstripped the tools and approaches we use to assess it in schools. He suggests that a major reason for this lag is the number of conceptual “imbalance” that are driving assessment practices in one-dimensional directions. These include, for example, a privileging of generic reading skills assessment to the exclusion of evaluations of how children use what they read in their lives. Afflerbach explores a number of other imbalances, making a persuasive case for multidimensional and multifaceted reading assessment. It seems particularly appropriate to read this chapter as an extension of Pearson, Raphael, Benson, and Madda’s reconceptualization of balanced literacy in Chapter 2.
Part IV: Perspectives on Special Issues

The four chapters in Part IV address timely issues in literacy instruction and professional development, each providing a relative wealth of resources. In “Instructional Resources in the Classroom: Deepening Understanding through Interactions with Multiple Texts and Multiple Media,” Linda Kucan, Diane Lapp, James Flood, and Douglas Fisher discuss integrated instruction, particularly through the use of multiple textual (and some additional media) sources across grade levels. After describing the research base for multi-source literacy instruction, which suggests both cognitive and affective benefits for students, they provide detailed descriptions of two teachers using integrated thematic literacy approaches. The chapter provides a number of helpful figures that depict the various elements of the thematic units.

D. Ray Reutzel then explores ways of designing differentiated literacy instruction in his chapter, “Organizing Effective Literacy Instruction: Differentiating Instruction to Meet the Needs of All Learners.” This chapter introduces a number of concrete practices for addressing some often-knotty questions concerning the specific ways differentiation plays out in practice. Appropriately, the author focuses specifically on grouping patterns and efficient use of time within the literacy block.

Drawing upon the notion of increasing individualization within literacy curriculum and instruction, Michael C. McKenna, Linda D. Labbo, David Reinking, and Tricia A. Zucker take up questions about the role of computer technology in “Effective Use of Technology in Literacy Instruction.” They demonstrate ways that digital media can enhance the responsiveness of literacy instruction to the needs of beginning readers, English-language learners, and students with learning disabilities, along with its general usefulness in more general contexts. The chapter also includes an illustration of technology use for each of the areas of reading and reading instruction identified by the NRP.

Breaking from the topic of instruction specifically, Part IV ends with “Best Practices in Professional Development for Improving Literacy Instruction” by Rita M. Bean and Aimee Morewood. They open by briefly describing some of the relevant positions held by panels of experts or professional groups (e.g., NRP, AERA), the relatively thin research base, and the major elements of professional development programs in general. Next, they focus on specific examples of potentially effective practices. These include implementing teacher-teacher peer coaching, developing collaborative work arrangements, conducting teacher research, and using online educational experiences.

Part V: Future Directions

Part V, fittingly, contains one chapter, “Achieving Best Practices,” by Michael Pressley. Pressley reflects upon the volume, distilling what he believes is its message—topics covered, broached, and ignored; questions addressed and left unanswered. The final sentence, Pressley’s call to the “hard work ahead . . . to improve reading education and provide comprehensive literacy instruction for all our students,” (p. 404) serves as a succinct characterization of the potential function of this text for educators. It also aptly captures the essence of a mission of a scholar who is and will continue to be sorely missed.

With its substantial breadth and sensible depth, Best Practices in Literacy Instruction serves as an essential resource for all interested in children’s learning and achievement. It is a must-read for educators.

References

Best Practices in Adolescent Literacy Instruction
Edited by Kathleen A. Hinchman and Heather K. Sheridan-Thomas

REVIEW BY JENNIFER RABOLD, BOSTON UNIVERSITY

As schools respond to the growing awareness of the challenges to sustain and improve adolescent literacy, *Best Practices in Adolescent Literacy Instruction*, edited by Kathleen Hinchman and Heather Sheridan-Thomas, serves as a comprehensive resource on the critical topics of adolescents’ multiple literacies, reading and writing in the content areas, literacy strategies designed for older students, motivation, assessment, and program development. Teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators committed to improving adolescent literacy instruction, as well as teacher educators interested in preparing teachers to provide effective literacy instruction in middle and secondary schools, will find this collection an invaluable resource.

*Best Practices in Adolescent Literacy Instruction* is organized into three sections, each providing a different lens through which to examine the topic. The first section, “Perspectives toward Adolescent Literacy Instruction,” paints a complex picture of today’s adolescents and their relationships to literacy. The second section, “Developing Reading and Writing Strategies for Multiple Contexts,” provides tools and techniques for approaching literacy development in various contexts and content areas. The third, “Adolescent Literacy Program Issues,” offers recommendations for administrators and teacher educators. Each chapter opens with goals for the reader and closes with incisive discussion questions to encourage reflection and to consider strategies for incorporating the ideas of the chapter into the reader’s practice. Each begins with a description of the learner and the literacy context and the theoretical perspectives that inform the strategies and the classroom implementation.

Part I: Perspectives toward Adolescent Literacy Instruction

In “Discussing Texts with Adolescents in Culturally Responsive Ways,” Alfred W. Tatum provides preliminary analysis of his research on adolescents’ “textual lineages,” texts that adolescents report as being important to their literacy development. He suggests that students’ choices should inform the selection of texts, to encourage introspection, bridge their in-school and out-of-school experiences, and honor their voices. In the second chapter, “Meaningful Content for Middle School Students for whom English is an Additional Language,” Eliane Rubinstein-Avila and Janelle Johnson attend to the voices of adolescents who are not always heard in discussions of adolescent literacy. They advocate that EAL students be allowed to use their full linguistic repertoire to help them develop literacy skills, as second language development is not independent from first language development in older bilingual students. Rubinstein-Avila and Johnson recommend using interdisciplinary units to help build background knowledge and literacy skills in context and suggest strategies for making content more comprehensible in the four major disciplines.

Part II: Developing Reading and Writing Strategies for Multiple Contexts

Part II opens with “Actively Engaging Middle School Students with Words” by Karen Bromley. The author summarizes the role of vocabulary in literacy learning and the research on how words are learned, although she inexplicably omits references to work by some of the seminal researchers in the field, such as Beck & McKeown, Blachowicz, Baumann, and Stahl’s later work. Bromley focuses on the need for students to be actively engaged with words in order to truly expand their vocabularies and describes five “interactive strategies” used by middle school teachers to encourage word learning. Unfortunately, the “strategies” are common activities that reflect few theoretical guiding principles, a disappointing limitation for an article on vocabulary, a topic that is informed by a substantial body of theory and research. The following chapter, “Strategy Matters: Comprehension Instruction for Older Youth,” by Rachel Brown, provides a thorough review of the research on cognitive
and sociocultural aspects of literacy, from pivotal studies of proficient readers to the most influential theories of meaning construction. She connects the research to shifts in strategy instruction, such as the increased awareness of out-of-school literacies, the redefinition of reader expertise, the attention to content-area comprehension strategies, and the importance of new technologies and new and hybrid genres, concluding with descriptions of best practices in comprehension instruction (see also, Pressley & Harris, 2006, this issue).

Cynthia Hynd Shanahan makes a strong case for teaching multiple texts in “Reading and Writing across Multiple Texts.” She argues that literate citizens today must construct plausible views and make claims using evidence from multiple, often contradictory sources, and demonstrates that the same skills are necessary in most academic disciplines, thoroughly but succinctly reviewing the research on multiple-text reading in history and science. She addresses concerns teachers might have about using multiple texts and addresses more specific multiple-text strategies for teachers to use in history, science, and mathematics. Following a compelling and comprehensive examination of multiple texts in the classroom, “Multimodality and Literacy Learning: Using Multiple Texts to Enhance Content-Area Learning” by Fenice B. Boyd and Mary K. Thompson is more limited. This chapter portrays a single seventh-grade classroom wherein the teacher incorporated several different text genres in designing a unit on the Civil Rights Movement. The authors include one excerpt from classroom discourse, although it consists primarily of teacher talk, and a few excerpts from students’ papers, which reveal little evidence of critical thinking or of the effect of multiple modes, except their ability to connect themes in more than one text. More subject to question is the teacher’s motivation in using multiple texts, so students “believe what they read” (p. 160), rather than learn to read critically in search of truth (see also, Bain, 2000, this issue).

The last four chapters in Part II delve into the specifics of literacy instruction in the content areas, an area of concern for middle and secondary school teachers and administrators, beginning with Heather K. Sheridan-Thomas’s “Assisting Struggling Readers with Textbook Comprehension.” Sheridan-Thomas addresses the purposes for teaching students to comprehend textbooks, which remain central to many content-area classrooms, and describes the types of readers who would benefit from such instruction. She identifies the features of textbooks to be considered in textbook selection, but also acknowledges that teachers may not have a choice. She thus presents principles and instructional strategies for teaching textbook comprehension, including examples of reading guides and a vignette of a middle school team working together on content-area literacy, an exemplary approach to literacy instruction in the academic disciplines. Elizabeth Birr Moje and Jennifer Speyer focus on the academic literacy skills required in specific disciplines in “The Reality of Challenging Texts in High School Science and Social Studies.” They identify the types of knowledge and skills students need to comprehend disciplinary texts, from semantic knowledge to discursive knowledge and pragmatic knowledge and skills, and address the role of motivation and interest in building knowledge and comprehending texts, encouraging educators to build units on topics of students’ interest. Moje and Speyer also identify the types of knowledge and skills teachers need to teach academic literacy, from deep disciplinary knowledge and flexible pedagogical knowledge to knowledge of students. Finally, they provide an example of literacy instructional strategies embedded in content-area classrooms and describe strategies for supporting content-area literacy.

Kelly Chandler-Olcott’s chapter on “Humanities Instruction for Adolescent Literacy Learners” might have been equally at home in the Program Issues section of the book, as it offers a way of thinking about curriculum and instruction in two traditionally separate academic disciplines: English language arts and social studies. Chandler-Olcott makes a case for humanities instruction, based upon her experience teaching at schools that integrated curriculum in these areas, and offers recommendations of best practices that can guide literacy instruction in humanities classrooms. In “Fostering Acquisition of Official Mathematics Language,” Codruta Temple and Kathleen A. Hinchman base their suggestions for best practices in literacy instruction in mathematics on the research on literacy development in mathematics, from early generic recommendations for teaching reading in the content areas to Halliday’s (1974) more discipline-specific work on the “mathematical register,” Rittenhouse’s (1998) identification of three math discourse communities, and Van Oers’ (2002) distinction between mathematical activities and mathematical practices. They maintain that helping students develop official mathematics language, through use of three distinct registers—everyday language, official mathematics language, and bridging language—is critical. The authors delineate the steps through which teachers can nurture the transformation to mathematical literacy, provide transcripts of class discussions that enact their theory and strategies, and include excerpts of student work that demonstrate the varying levels of success students experience in developing mathematical discourse.

Part III: Adolescent Literacy Program Issues
Gay Ivey opens Part III with “Intervening When Older Youth Struggle with Reading,” in which she evaluates and rejects popular ready-made literacy interventions, which she categorizes as the “fix-it model,” the “reading-problem-of-the-month model,” and the “compliance model.” Ivey outlines the features of high-quality interventions: personalized and ongoing assessments, substantial opportunities to read and write, extensive and varied collection of reading material, and expert teachers as instructors. Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey also focus on struggling readers in “Instructional Moves that Support Adolescent Learners who have Histories of Failure” and suggest that students with disabilities or histories of school failure learn from school-wide literacy initiatives, provided they have access to the core curriculum in the regular classroom. However, they insist that struggling students must receive differentiated curriculum and instruction, applying Pearson and Gallagher’s (1983) gradual release of responsibility model, and that
they must be provided with appropriate accommodations and modifications, of which they include several examples (see also, Deshler, et al., 2000, this issue).

In “Traveling Together over Difficult Ground,” Cindy Litman and Cynthia Greenleaf present a case study of a struggling student in a high school chemistry class in order to demonstrate the instructional model of the Reading Apprenticeship. They define the characteristics of the Reading Apprenticeship, identify key features of the learning environment, and highlight the importance of year-long literacy routines and metacognitive conversations in the practice of a chemistry teacher enacting the apprenticeship model. Then Litman and Greenleaf provide a narrative of the progress of a particular student in the class, exploring how the student responded to the instructional sequencing over the school year. The authors conclude by summarizing the key features of classroom practices that promote success with adolescents. Mark W. Conley addresses accountability in “Literacy Assessment for Adolescents: What’s Fair About It?” He first answers his question in the negative, what’s not fair about it, but soon offers detailed guidelines on the principles of fair and responsible literacy assessment of adolescents, focusing particularly on the importance of the instructional usefulness of assessment. Like many of the authors in the book, he recognizes adolescents’ multiple literacies, but stresses the need to help them to acquire literacies that are valued in school and work. Finally, Conley proposes that educators assess their own assessment practices, suggesting several approaches to improving systems of assessment.

The final two chapters of the book are directed toward those responsible for developing literacy programs or educating teachers. David W. Moore’s “Program Development” presents an overview of influential recommendations for developing secondary school literacy programs: the IRA’s Adolescent Literacy position statement (1999), Reading Next (2004), and the Center on Instruction’s Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents (2007). He then applies the recommendations of these documents to three pivotal components of adolescent literacy programs: Leadership structures, instructional sites, and characteristics of effective programs, the last of which functions as a very effective checklist for a school or district designing a new program or revising an existing one. Patricia L. Anders addresses pre-service teacher education and professional development for practicing teachers in “Multiple Dimensions of Adolescent Literacy Teacher Education.” She identifies the features of outstanding pre-service literacy education programs and the principles of effective professional development in literacy. She reviews some of the challenges and issues facing educators who are concerned with adolescent literacy today, including the diverse student demographics, the impact of technology and multiple literacies, and the language and culture of the disciplines, all matters that are discussed at length by the authors in this collection who identify and describe best practices in adolescent literacy.

The best practices described in this collection are not, in the words of David Moore, “meant to comprise a grab-bag of rainy-day activities; they are meant to serve as a principled approach toward validated instructional practices” (p. 326). Some of the chapters address the interests of particular constituencies: middle or high school teachers, administrators, or teacher educators, those who are responsible for discipline-specific or general literacy instruction. But all will provide readers with theoretically sound, research-based perspectives on the principles of adolescent literacy instruction and the promising strategies that provide the opportunity to increase opportunities for student learning and to reflect more deeply about their own practice.

References


**Best Practices in Writing Instruction**

Edited by Steve Graham, Charles A. MacArthur, and Jill Fitzgerald


**REVIEW BY MICHAEL HARTEN, BOSTON UNIVERSITY**

Although the research in writing is relatively recent when compared to the history of reading research, Steve Graham, Charles A. MacArthur, and Jill Fitzgerald concluded that there was enough definitive research in writing to inform instruction and to join with a group of colleagues to produce this text. Overall, *Best Practices in Writing Instruction* is an effective handbook that presents to teachers and administrators the current best practices in writing, informed by theory and research.

The editors suggest that four interrelated principles justify writing instruction: that writing is essential, that schools must do a better job of teaching writing, that we know what skilled writing looks like, and that there are effective procedures for teaching writing. To the question of whether we “know enough about effective instructional practices to help students become strategic, knowledgeable, and motivated writers,” the editors emphatically assert that the answer is “yes” (p. 6).

The book is organized into three parts. The first section, “Designing Effective Writing Programs,” includes four chapters that examine writing instruction with specific attention to exemplary elementary classrooms, a process writing approach, a developmental perspective, and writing across the curriculum at the secondary level. In the second section, “Strategies for Teaching and Learning,” specific elements of the writing process, including planning, revising, sentence construction, and spelling and handwriting, are explained in depth. In addition, chapters on motivation, the use of the Internet to foster writing, and assessment are included. Although the specific strategies presented in the second section present research that informs instruction for all students across grade levels, two additional chapters focus on specific strategies for young children and for adolescents. The final section, “Special Populations,” focuses on multilingual learners and students with special needs.

**Part I: Designing Effective Writing Programs**

The first part begins with “Writing Instruction in Engaging and Effective Elementary Settings,” in which Michael Pressley, Lindsey Mohan, Lauren Fingeret, Kelly Reffitt, and Lisa Raphael-Bogaert draw upon decades of experience as researchers and practitioners to describe the salient characteristics of effective classroom and school environments for engaging elementary students in writing. The authors identify the responsibilities of the school: “commit to teaching students to plan, draft, and revise” (p. 24); make a long-term commitment to improving writing, because progress is slow; provide daily instruction and practice, with increasing demand for improvement over the years and in all curriculum areas; and create classrooms that are positive, enthusiastic environments for learning.

This chapter opens the volume by providing an overview of the characteristics of effective classrooms. Many of the ideas identified in this chapter, such as engagement, daily instruction, and writing as part of a demanding curriculum in all disciplines, are explored in depth in later chapters. Although the focus is the elementary classroom, the characteristics described in this chapter can also be applied to middle and high school classrooms. School administrators may want to have all teachers read this chapter before beginning any significant change to a school’s writing curriculum.

In Chapter 2, “Best Practices in Implementing a Process Approach to Writing,” Ruie J. Pritchard and Ronald D. Honeycutt explain that a process approach must “integrate an overall teaching philosophy with specific methods of writing instruction” (p. 29), and describe six “lesson foci” relevant to the process approach. While Pritchard and Honeycutt recommend specific instruments to measure student’s emotional responses to writing, they are less specific in their advice for teaching students to understand the writing process and to learn self-regulation strategies. They do, however, provide teachers and administrators with an overview of some important elements of the process approach and describe several areas of targeted strategy instruction, including ideas and content, organization, and voice.

In Chapter 3, “Best Narrative Writing Practices When Teaching from a Developmental Framework,” Anne McKeough, Jamie Palmer, Marya Jarvey, and Stan Bird use the contexts of realistic fiction and trickster tales to demonstrate how children’s capacity for composing narratives develops over time. They also describe specific empirically validated teaching strategies that support children’s story composition, in particular, strategies for building conceptual bridges, introducing conjunctions, and presenting stories in pictures and text. Their detailed description of lesson blocks may be particularly useful to elementary teachers as a model for improving writing within a developmental context.

In the final chapter of the first part, “Best Practices in Developing a Writing Across the Curriculum Program in the Secondary School,” George Newell, Susan Koukis, and Stacy Boster stress the necessity of changing the culture of a school from the transmission of knowledge to the construction of knowledge in order to implement effective writing instruction across the curriculum. Through their fictitious account of English teachers Martha and Jane at Thomas Jefferson High School, the authors illustrate the characteristics of a successful initiative: the support of administrators, initial effort by a network of skilled leaders in English departments and other departments, a range of activities that foster content-knowledge and writing development, and new tools and expectations for assessing writing. The authors’ unique approach of providing a fictional context to describe the many challenges to teachers of writing across the curriculum creates an engaging narrative for the reader. Although the chapter may not offer as many specifics about program implementation as teachers and administrators may want, the authors are likely to achieve their stated...
goal, that practitioners "will use this chapter as a means for reflect-
ing not only on their own beliefs and assumptions, but also on the-
actions necessary to contribute to a professional learning com-
" (p. 97).

Part II: Strategies for Teaching and Learning
In the first chapter of the second part, "Writing Instruction for
Young Children," David Coker clearly and effectively explains six-
challenges that young writers face, offers specific instructional-
methods to address the challenges, and finally details a specific les-
son taught by a kindergarten teacher. Coker’s clarity of presenta-
tion and descriptions of multiple strategies to address each
challenge make his chapter one of the most useful in the volume.
Although the chapter addresses young children in particular, many
of the strategies he presents, including book-reading interventions
drawing on the work of A. G. Bus (2001) are applicable to other
developmental levels as well.

Dolores Perin’s “Best Practices in Teaching Writing to Adoles-
cents” is the other chapter in this section that addresses a specific
age group. Although different in structure from Coker’s chapter,
Perin’s text is equally effective, presenting eleven recommenda-
tions from a meta-analysis (Graham & Perin, 2006) of studies
across grades 4 to 12, from largest effect size (strategy instruction)
to smallest (writing to learn), and providing six areas for teachers
to consider as they attempt to implement the recommendations.
The clear organization and specific information make Perin’s chap-
ter a must-read for teachers and administrators at the middle and
high school levels.

The other chapters in the second part address specific ele-
ments of the writing process; most of them report sound research
and effective descriptions of practice. In particular, Steve Graham
and Karen Harris’s chapter, “Best Practices in Teaching Planning,”
provides eight principles for teaching planning that can serve as
an effective guide for teachers at all grade levels. Like Graham
and Harris, Charles MacArthur’s "Best Practices in Teaching Eval-
uation and Revision” ends with specific classroom examples. He
clearly articulates the need to provide instruction in evaluation
along with instruction in revision, and his explanation of the value
of integrating reading comprehension, on which evaluation and
reading depend, with instruction in these processes is particularly
compelling.

Bruce Saddler’s “Improving Sentence Construction Skills
through Sentence-Combining Practice” effectively describes the
decades of significant research demonstrating the potential of sen-
tence combining for improving writing. Of the two examples he
provides, the second grade example is more detailed and specific
than the tenth grade example. Bob Schlagel, in "Best Practices in
Spelling and Handwriting,” clearly articulates the research that
informs spelling and handwriting instruction and argues for
increasing the emphasis on these skills. The specific audience of
ey early elementary teachers will benefit from his clear description of
the current research on handwriting and spelling.

The final chapters in the second section go beyond specific
strategies to address larger concepts. In “Best Practices in Promot-
ing Motivation for Writing,” Peter Boscolo and Carmen Gelati
define a motivated student as one who wants to write “because he
or she thinks that writing is a worthwhile activity (although not
always an enjoyable one)” (p. 207). Drawing on recent research by
Bruning and Horn (2000) and Hidi and Boscolo (2006), the
authors offer three guidelines for developing motivation to write
and give specific examples of lessons that adhere to the guidelines.
Although their examples focus on elementary school, the chapter
provides an overarching discussion of the importance of motiva-
tion that should be foundational for practitioners at all levels.

In “Best Practices in Using the Internet to Support Writing,”
Rachel Karchmer-Klein avoids some of the difficulties in keeping
this type of chapter current by focusing on specific uses of the
Internet, including WebQuests, collaborative Internet projects,
and classroom websites. Because Karchmer-Klein is so specific,
practitioners whose classrooms are equipped to use these innova-
tions are her primary audience.

The final chapter in the second section, “Best Practices in Writ-
ing Assessment,” by Robert Calfee and Roxanne Greitz Miller, is
intended to “survey assessment concepts and techniques,” (p. 267)
and assumes little, if any, prior knowledge of assessment. They
describe embedding assessments in subject-matter learning, con-
trast concepts such as process and product and testing and assess-
ment, and discuss prompts, procedures, and rubrics in the context
of "embedded assessments" (p. 278). As a survey of the concept of
assessment, Calfee and Miller effectively provide a concise
overview of the key concepts of formative assessment. For those
teachers, especially English language arts teachers, with some
knowledge of assessment, the authors’ conceptual framework of
instruct-assess-evaluate-report (p. 269) offers new insights for
teaching and assessing writing. (See also, Shepard, 2000, this issue.)

Part III: Special Populations
The editors’ inclusion of a section that focuses on special popula-
tions acknowledges the realities of today’s classrooms. With the
increasing number of English language learners every year, and
with 10–20% of all students requiring special education, every
teacher must be familiar with the challenges and rewards of teach-
ing writing to these particular students.

Jill Fitzgerald and Steve Amendum present a review of the liter-
ature on writing instruction for multilingual learners (Fitzgerald,
2005). They found only three reliable conclusions in the literature:
ESL writers progress through similar developmental stages as
native English writers, knowledge and skill can transfer from first-
and second-language writing, and composing processes may be
similar across native and second-language writing. After identifying
several premises based on these findings, Fitzgerald and Amendum
describe specific multilingual writing activities. In addition to
describing the activity, and the population, premises, setting, pur-
poses, and procedure of each activity, they provide suggestions for
adaptations, an extremely useful addition for classroom teachers. Although the research is still in its preliminary stages, the authors effectively offer some guiding principles and specific activities to address the needs of multilingual students.

Finally, in “Best Practices in Teaching Writing to Students with Special Needs,” Susan De La Paz describes the differences in writing ability between special needs children and other children and discusses the types of assessment that are effective with certain populations of special needs children. She concludes by describing five elements of successful writing programs for students with special needs. The classroom teacher will benefit greatly from De La Paz’s clear presentation of differences, assessment, and instruction. In particular, the descriptions of curriculum-based measurements and dynamic assessment may help many teachers to assess special needs children more accurately. The inclusion of specific elements of successful programs, including Self-Regulated Strategy Instruction (Graham & Harris, 2005) and speech recognition software, can serve as a guide for practitioners in helping special needs students improve their writing.

The stated goal of the editors was to “help teachers become more effective at teaching writing” (p. 1). They have done an effective job of bringing experts in writing research together to present what they know about best practices. The volume has the power to improve the knowledge base of teachers and to acquaint them with the research that informs best practice. This volume is a valuable resource for classroom teachers and administrators at all levels, whether they read one chapter or all fifteen.

References


