

Anne D. Forester & Margaret Reinhard.
THE LEARNERS' WAY.
 Canada: Pequis Publishers, 1990.
 300 pp.

For months, I have been haunted by the vision of Tina Cain's "cringing" when "summoned to read to her classmates" in elementary school (*The Gazette*, Montreal, 22 Jan. 1990). Tina was illiterate. At age thirteen, she died in a Montreal detention home fire which had been set by two other girls planning an escape. The headline was: "Fire victim's 'only crime': she hated school."

It is almost unbelievable that today such a tragedy could occur. Looking at the vast amount of university research into how children learn and how they acquire language-arts skills, we expect this research to work its way into the classroom. Obviously, not so. We still see at all levels of education teachers who discourage student questioning, discussion, educated guessing, creativity, and freedom of expression.

I believe that teaching is no different from life in general, that kindness and shared laughter are the best antidotes to frustration and feelings of worthlessness. As a recent student in a strictly teacher-oriented class, I was able (unfortunately) to experience these feelings first hand. But my faith in teachers was restored when I read in *The Learners' Way*, these lines – for me, the crux of teaching: "Feelings play an important role in enhancing or blocking learning and memory. By creating a learning environment that stimulates curiosity, excitement and the urge to explore, we ensure that the learners' natural inclination to seek new information is used to its fullest. By encouraging all efforts to learn and focussing on positive achievements, we make learning safe and avoid the blocking that comes into play through fear, anxiety or anger" (pp. 7, 9). Frame that.

Forester and Reinhard, of Victoria, B.C., in *The Learners' Way*, explain in detail how the "whole-language" approach to reading and writing works in the elementary classroom (K-3). Forester, a professor at Camosun College, and Reinhard, a primary teacher, define the whole-language approach as "adapting teaching to the child's way of learning." In 1973, dissatisfied with results of basal reader teaching, they began research into how children learn. They found that parents model for their baby, provide feedback, emphasize meaning rather than form, and encourage trial-and-error learning. They found that in learning language, the baby moves from whole to parts (random babbling – then babbling in recognizable intonation); from concrete to abstract (feeling, seeing, hearing mother – then saying "Mama"); from gross to fine (saying to mother, "pick you up," – then "pick me up.").

The authors contend that children come to school with an "effective language learning system, they will continue to use if allowed." The authors

adopted, based on their research, the whole-language approach as the one most closely conforming to their new philosophy. Abandoning the basal reader approach for this new method of teaching reading and writing, they dove whole-hog into whole-language, to come up gasping for air, but triumphant!

The Learners' Way, "a practical pedagogical guide for classroom teachers," contains a treasury of material: the authors' underlying philosophy, specific teaching techniques that work, examples of student writing, how to set up learning stations, general classroom management, and how to maintain that "positive energy" necessary to being a good teacher.

Reinhard has a new approach to behavior problems. Instead of nagging, she uses praise and exemplifies good behavior. She overlooks talking at quiet time, daydreaming, bad grammar or printing, and slight roughhousing. Like parents, she models, provides feedback and encourages practice. And with all the various activities going on in the classroom, the children don't have time to get into trouble!

The authors say that the key to success of the whole-language approach is the learning climate (books, books, books), building self-confidence (begin with the reading of familiar nursery rhymes), and fostering independence in the students ("letting-go is the most far-reaching as well as the most difficult part of teaching the learners' way. Hang in there and trust. . . children to learn, given an empowering environment.").

Three decades ago, the First Grade Studies, a massive United States research project, showed that the teacher, not the method of teaching, produced good readers. (A good teacher could work with any approach and get good results.) Now a good teacher can use the whole-language approach, and get excellent results! And all this through "learning by doing and observing what happens."

Although this book is written for elementary teachers, it also would be valuable for teachers of remedial reading and of special education. With its emphasis on child-centered learning (self-expression, self-pacing, working productively with other children), it could prove to be an important, even indispensable volume.

Forester and Reinhard conclude on a high note. By understanding how children learn, and acting and building upon this knowledge, they have found: "The teacher gains insight into (the children's) ways of learning, and there arises a feeling of awe at the marvellous capacity each and every child brings to learning. The climate of delight is invigorating indeed!"

I would add, also, that the whole-language approach is less stressful and tiring than trying to do everything by oneself. The teacher is no longer

working alone – it is now a sharing, cooperative venture with the students, with all working toward the same goal. To me, this is what teaching is all about.

Perhaps this book will help spread “the climate of delight” across Canada. If it helps prevent the anguish of another Tina Cain, it will be worthwhile. If it helps lower our national rate of illiteracy, it will be wonderful.

Judith Isherwood
Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec.

John N. Miner.

**THE GRAMMAR SCHOOLS OF MEDIEVAL ENGLAND:
A.F. LEACH IN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE.**

**Montreal & Toronto: McGill Queen's University Press, 1990.
384 pp. \$42.50.**

In 1884 A.F. Leach, a young barrister, a graduate of Oxford, was appointed a charity commissioner with the purpose, in the light of the findings of the Endowed Schools Act, of re-organizing the allocation of funds from endowments made to schools and other educational bodies. This proved to be a formidable task for many reasons. First, there was no unified central system of accounting and recording the diverse forms of endowment. There were, it is true, lots of partially relevant documents stored in many offices of ancient boroughs, in cathedrals, churches, and universities, but these were widely distributed, in many forms and usually written in idiosyncratic Latin. Further, many were very old, damaged, and missing. They referred to a confusing number of different kinds of schools. There were, for example, charity schools for choristers, hospital schools rather like alms houses, and there were some which awarded degrees. Some schools had ceased to exist, others had been refounded in a similar or different form with the same or different name. Over the medieval period social upheavals, such as the dissolution of the monasteries, the rejection of papal influence, and catastrophes like the Black Death, all led to difficulties in collecting and integrating information about schools in different places at different times; then, some authorities refused to give evidence.

For some 40 years, Leach was closely involved in tracing and studying old manuscripts amassing an enormous, but not complete, amount of data from which he published extensively. He wrote a number of detailed specific works on individual schools which had adequate records. His major contribution from the documentary study of England's medieval grammar schools was of an institutional kind. He was unable to deal adequately with evidence