

BOOK REVIEWS

CATHY FLEISCHER. *Teachers Organizing for Change: Making literacy learning everybody's business*. Urbana, IL: NCTE (2000). 207 pp. \$19.95 (members \$15.95) (ISBN 0-8141-4999-5).

"How can teachers inform parents and the wider public about the nature of literacy learning and what they do in schools to teach literacy?" Cathy Fleischer answers this and other related questions in her new book. She uses detailed case studies of teachers who have successfully developed a variety of strategies and practices to inform and extend public understandings of literacy and how it is learned. She makes a comparison between activists working for change in other fields of social justice; i.e., public and community health, social workers, environmental and water quality advocates. Throughout her comparison she emphasizes the theory and literature of community organizing when she discusses the work of teacher and social activists. Fleischer demonstrates the connection to the statement: Organizing is teaching.

Fleischer is passionate in her exhortations for classroom teachers to become involved in the larger political discussion of education. "As classroom teachers and English educators, we cannot sit back any longer and let those who are not knowledgeable about classrooms and kids and the complex contexts that are our schools set the tone and the language for public discussion. We must become leaders in informing the public about the complexity and the reality of public education; we must become political." (p.6)

In Chapter 2 Fleischer shows us case studies of individual teachers. Each of Fleischer's case studies profiles teachers who have been successful in demonstrating to the parents of their students why and how they teach literacy. Each teacher was proactive in informing and explaining their pedagogy to the students' parents, before the parents raised questions. It is Fleischer's hope that by reading about these successful teachers, other teachers will be able to build on their practices and build a successful parental outreach program. She wants to build upon these successful programs to create a

sustained system of parent outreach and thereby “create a new mindset for people – about teachers, about the curriculum, about best practices.” (p.9)

In addition to the case studies of successful teacher organizers in Chapter 2, in Chapter 3, Fleischer introduces the reader to the literature and practices of community organizing that are defined as “people working together to get things done.” (p.13) She further introduces the community organizing approach in a variety of disciplines: social work, public health, natural resources. She does this through interviews with various activists/organizers. She illustrates how teaching and community organizing are similar, because teachers are natural organizers. “Think what we do everyday to create and sustain communities in our classrooms. We take a bunch of disparate individuals, sometimes up to thirty-five or forty at a time, who bring diverse backgrounds, experiences, socioeconomic factors, race, gender, interest, reading level, skills, strengths, and motivations, and somehow – at our best – manage to form a cohesive group.” (p.13)

Fleischer proceeds to show how teachers can use their knowledge of classroom organization and in turn to build upon the theory and practices of community organizing to expand it to parent outreach. She believes that, through teachers combining their classroom skills with those of community organizing, the end result will be a strengthening of teachers’ ability to enter the public conversation. This will create a new way of thinking about education and especially literacy learning.

In Chapter 4 Fleischer makes the connections between what community organizers and teachers do. She suggests some general components that teachers might consider for their own parent outreach programs if they take on the role of a community organizer. She connects the individual teacher case studies in Chapter 2 with her new knowledge of community organizing. She doesn’t want to mandate a step-by-step process, but instead suggest some principles that arose from her study of community organizers; e.g., “How do inservice nights for parents compare to neighbourhood meetings for organizers?”

In Chapter 5 Fleischer shows teachers how they can take on the role of “teacher organizer.” She suggests how a community organizing model might work in practice. She uses scenarios based on true stories shared with her by teachers to demonstrate how teacher educators can introduce the concept of advocacy in their methods classes. This is an approach teacher leaders might try out in their professional development for practicing teachers. Fleischer suggests that writing scenarios and enacting them (one of community organizing’s standard training approaches) is a process that enables teachers to think through their own situations and contexts. Thus, she provides workshop materials that can be used to prepare groups of inservice

and preservice teachers to reach out to parents and the larger public to create a more accurate understanding of literacy learning in schools.

Fleischer's book introduces teachers to the wider world of community organizing and shows how teachers can use the concepts and strategies from community organizing to better inform parents and the larger public about literacy learning in schools. She demonstrates how the time teachers spend in parent outreach is, "in effect time spent developing and realizing effective instruction for their students and time saved in working through misunderstandings and handling problems." This is a very timely and useful book for teachers.

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MARIE M. CLAY. *Change Over Time in Children's Literacy Development*. Auckland, NZ & Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann (2001). 328 pp. \$29.50 (ISBN 0-325-00383-1 [0-86863-300-3 in New Zealand]).

In her meticulously documented book, *Change over Time in Children's Literacy Development*, Marie Clay provides the reader with an honest, non-intrusive but provocative alternative to conventional support for early literacy. Dr. Clay, whose work began in New Zealand four decades ago, is the founder of Reading Recovery, the foremost researched early intervention program in the world today. Reading Recovery (RR) has been launched successfully on four continents and delivered in both English and Spanish. RR is currently being developed in French for implementation in all parts of bilingual Canada. She writes, "This early intervention is like a standard boat tossed into several turbulent rivers and struggling to master the rapids and stay afloat in each of them" (p. 298). Clay challenges early intervention reading professionals, tutors, and researchers alike to ask more questions in order to continue the search for even better solutions in their work with children. In this book Clay succeeds in silencing the critics who have misconceptions of early interventions. She believes that "sound research" is essential to sustain support for early intervention programs such as Reading Recovery.

There are eight distinctive chapters in *Change over Time*. The author presents so much of her valuable acquired knowledge in this one publication that I believe this is the foundation for a "pandect" or complete digest on Reading Recovery.

In chapter one, the author challenges parents, teachers, and reading researchers to think about the "common ground" that beginning reading and writing share, regardless of the reading approach employed currently in schools. Clay insists that when children fall behind their classmates who