

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrages

Conley, M., Freidhoff, J., Sherry, M., & Forbes Tuckey, S. (2008). *Meeting the challenges of adolescent literacy: Research we have, research we need*. New York, NY: Guildford Press. 162 pages.

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It is true: the school system's "dirty little secret" is about to be uncovered. Some teachers, principals, and school board officials may respond with ignorance to the growing adolescent literacy problem, but I can assure you many of us know the problem exists. The trouble is, we cannot pinpoint the cause or easy solution. Society places more and more responsibility on school administrators and teachers. Growing class sizes, learning disabilities, changing family dynamics, addictions, and teacher bullying are just a few of the issues that educators deal with every day. Teachers are so busy trying to be parents, doctors, and social workers that fitting reading, writing, and arithmetic into the schedule is becoming ever more challenging. Tackling another huge problem in a system that is already stressed has ultimately influenced many educators to turn a blind eye and push the growing pandemonium of adolescent literacy to the back burner. Nonetheless, this problem cannot wait. We need answers and support now. The collection of eight articles titled *Meeting the Challenge of Adolescent Literacy: Research We Have, Research We Need* edited by Mark W. Conley, Joseph R. Freidhoff, Michael B. Sherry, and Steven Forbes Tuckey, tackles this issue head on, and although it is based on the American school system, most of the information speaks to Canadians as well. Not only does this text identify research we have and need, it details interventions for all subject teachers to use in their classrooms.

The writers of this collection are enthusiastic and passionate. They provide insightful, realistic information about the problems surrounding adolescent literacy, particularly with reference to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, specifically African American males. The writers outline areas that require further study and collectively acknowledge a need for valid and usable research to ensure effective intervention. More importantly, this text identifies this problem as both society's and the education system's problem. In a country where we are known to value each other equally, we should take this book as a call to action. Kathleen A. Hinchman's article, "Intervening When Older Youths Struggle with Reading: Teach Me What I Need to Know Next," focuses on motivating students through meeting their individual needs. Although research indicates remediation is ineffective by the time students reach adolescence, "this chapter is constructed from the stance that we have a moral obligation toward older youths who struggle with reading" (p.12). Hinchman uses her knowledge of working in a summer literacy clinic that provided a safe, nurturing environment for students to receive extra support for literacy challenges. The motto for this literacy clinic was "teach me what I need to know

next." Here, students were tutored individually, their specific needs were identified, and the circumstances that enabled students to create expectations for themselves were acknowledged and reevaluated. Facilitators valued multiple literacies and attempted to build bridges between them. This one-to-one instruction proved to be valuable; however, this is not always available at most schools because it is cost prohibitive. Hinchman identifies that, presently, secondary English teachers, along with other subject area teachers, are expected to teach reading to their students. Regular classroom teachers simply do not have the training to do this. Primarily, Hinchman's article addresses literacy issues to which educators need to pay attention. Secondly, it gives concrete examples such as think-alouds and assessing word analysis strategies that have promoted student success. There is absolutely a need for more information, and research on remediating adolescents, especially in a larger survey of students. What Hinchman's article does is tell us that, yes, in this instance, students were able to improve and reach a newly realized potential. By providing specific techniques, Hinchman produces a persuasive argument that we educators need to push for action and work towards more effective ways to meet our students' needs.

"Strategies That Improve Adolescents' Performance with Content-Area Texts," written by Mark W. Conley, Joseph R. Freidhoff, Kristine Gritter, and Deborah Vriend Van Duinen discusses the "flimsy" evidence we have regarding adolescent literacy. Much of the information we have is based on circumstantial evidence. This article argues that the current methods of testing do not take external factors into consideration. An unmotivated, deeply frustrated youth may not perform to their best ability on a test day. This article indicates that we need to focus on how teachers' teaching strategies and students' learning strategies can be connected so students can become more successful (p.88-89). The writers state:

there is a great need for more purposeful quantitative and qualitative research on effective classroom adolescent literacy practices-research that informs teachers about the kind of adolescent involved in the research, research that can be replicated across classrooms and can establish a corpus of adolescent research, and research that deals with the very real literacy struggles of adolescents and their teacher. (p.91)

Although this article gives a bleak look at the ongoing attempts to improve literacy for adolescents, it does agree to further research many strategies found in this book. These writers clearly identify the vast problem areas in regards to this topic and encourage educators to improve how research is collected. This article is a bit overwhelming to read; many areas of the education system need improvement. Even though it lacks the overall optimistic flavor that Hinchman's article provides, it does offer potential solutions and realistic ideas. To truly be able to solve this problem, we need to know where we stand. The writers should be commended for their honest and thought provoking contribution to this collection.

Cathy M. Roller's article, "Literacy Coaching" takes on the traditional "pull out" approach used by so many resources teachers across the country and argues that instead of pulling kids out, we need to place more supports within the classroom. She believes training regular classroom teachers in literacy will be an effective way to combat the literacy challenges we face. Literacy coaching has improved teachers' self efficacy and as a result, students

benefited (p.146). Roller states: "Grinder (1996) reported significant advantages for children taught by coached teachers as opposed to those whose teachers did not receive coaching" (p. 146). While Hinchman's article valued the one-to-one approach, Roller promotes keeping students together. Adding supports to a classroom may be a more economical way to address this problem; however, it is quite evident that more inquiry is needed.

Regardless of how these writers suggest we combat the challenges of adolescent literacy, it is clear they remain united on the front of finding ways to research more effectively so appropriate training and support can be established. Many of the writers in this collection come from different experiences and approaches, but clearly that they all have a passion for this subject. They all want to meet the challenges of adolescent literacy. As Elizabeth Birr Moje states in her article "Responsive Literacy Teaching in Secondary School Content Areas": "We need to develop ways to assess the range of skills, strategies, disposition and knowledge that youths learn when we respond to who they are and take them to new levels of learning" (p.59). Nurturing students' self esteem is not enough (p.58). We need to find answers and create interventions that can be implemented with some level of consistency leading to the creation of independent learners. This text provides the basic information we possess and what we need to acquire. It provides a starting point for researchers working on this problem, as well as strategies for regular classroom teachers to experiment within their classes. This book speaks to all of society. It unveils the problems in the current educational system, while acknowledging that society as a whole needs to take responsibility for ensuring our students are functionally literate when they graduate. I recommend it highly to teachers and graduate students and faculty alike.