BOOK REVIEWS

Engaging Every Learner, edited by Blankstein, M. A., Cole, W. R., & Houston, D. P. Published by Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, California, 2007 (199 pages).

Engaging Every Learner is a collection of nine essays arranged into nine chapters. Each essay seems to have a dominant theme which includes making schools effective, effective leadership and strategies to ensure that each learner is given the opportunity to learn. The overall theme of the book focuses on educating everybody's children and bridging the achievement gap between demographic groups.

In *Terms of Engagement*: *Where Failure is Not an Option*, Alan Blankstein suggests that no student should be allowed to fail in today's competitive world. He recommends that supportive structures, which include effective school culture and courageous leadership must be implemented to ensure high academic achievement for every student.

Chapter two is titled *From Vision to Reality*. Pedro Noguera and Alan Blankstein discuss the role educational leaders need to play to effectively engage every learner. Professor Noguera suggests that the leader must let all stakeholders know about his vision and actively enlist their support to achieve this vision. He believes that the key to student achievement is school culture reform.

Delores and Randall Lindsey write on *Culturally Proficient Equity Audits: A Tool for Engaging Every Learner*. They argue that achievement gaps exist between demographic groups in America, and suggest the use of Culturally Proficient Equity Audits as a tool to bridge the inequalities in learning and the gap in access to educational resources. They are afraid, however, that these audits could become too institutionalized and breed negative consequences. I think, however, that some form of assessment is necessary.

Antoinette Mitchell writes on *The Emergence of a Knowledge Base for Teaching Diverse Learners in Big-City Schools: From Practice to Theory to Practice.* She focuses on developing solutions within the school context to address low academic achievement in urban schools. She suggests that emphasis

be placed on the quality of teachers produced and the need for new teachers to master a codified body of specialized knowledge as well being equipped with skills to successfully teach diverse groups of students. Although the quality of the teacher produced is important, I believe that other complex social issues like poverty and malnutrition need a multifaceted approach in improving Instruction schools.

Stephen Peters' chapter is entitled *Capture, Inspire, Teach*. He suggests that teachers must first understand students' diverse backgrounds and experiences before they can effectively teach them. He also suggests that it is important for teachers to assess their own professional behavior. He suggests that leaders must first change themselves, and then school improvement will be the consequence. He proposes a Capture, Inspire, Teach model to promote high student achievement.

The chapter on *All our Children Learning: New Views on the Work of Benjamin S. Bloom* was written by Thomas Guskey. He makes the assertion that all students do not achieve the same degree of learning in school, and that this results in achievement gaps. He discusses Bloom's work on variation in student achievement, and his concept of mastery learning. This chapter was really challenging and thought provoking.

Engaging Every Learner: Blurring the Lines for learning to Ensure that all Young People are Ready for College, Work, and Life is written by Karen Pittman and Merita Irby. The focus is on community educational partnerships as a strategy to effectively prepare every student for higher education, and for their future. I also agree that schools alone cannot do it all so far as educating students for life is concerned. The community must be actively engaged to support public education. I also believe that apart from academic education the community should also pass on the desired values to students.

Alan Boyle writes on *Compassionate Intervention: Helping Failing Schools to Turn Around*. He advocates immediate interventions to turn failing schools around and suggests some strategies for doing so. He suggests that schools must not be allowed to deteriorate before attempts are made to rectify the situation. Too often, administrators blame the students, or the parents, or the government, or the budget. But in reality, the only thing they can really change is their own attitude and administration, so they need to begin there.

Richard Farson writes in the last chapter on *The Case for Failure: Risk, Innovation, and Engagement*. Educators should be innovative and accept failure. He encourages educators to try out new ideas and not be scared about failing. Change, in his view comes by trying out new ideas, failing and repeating the cycle. This chapter is also stimulating with the assurance that educators must not be afraid to fail but willing to try out new ideas. Farson also encourages

educators to abandon school programs which do not work. I agree with him on this point, since it does not make sense to continue traveling on a wrong path.

This is an excellent book for student teachers, educators, principals and administrators and anybody interested in improving student achievement and bridging the gap between demographic groups. The authors are experts in their various fields of research and bring diverse experiences together into one book. . I highly recommend this book for anyone who has a passion for helping every student learn, regardless of their race or socioeconomic status. The ideas seem practical and realistic, and appear to be things that might actually make a difference in the lives of students, which is, after all, the goal of education.

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Faculty Mentoring: The Power of Students in Developing Technology Expertise, edited by: Thompson, A. D., Chuang, H., & Sahin, I. Published by Information Age, Charlotte, NC, 2007 (162 pages).

This book addresses the difficulty of getting teachers to inculcate technology into their teaching, and discusses how the students become mentors to these professors. It views the older teachers and professors as immigrants to the world of technology, something that they didn't know from childhood, unlike the younger generation which grew up immersed in this environment.

This book grew out of a project that made its debut more than 15 years ago in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in Iowa State University, which has grown from having 10 pairs to more than 50 student mentor/faculty mentee pairs. It all began from the goal of the department which was to infuse education with technology in order to improve student learning. In 1991, when Ann Thompson became chair of the department, they began to "infuse technology into the teacher education curriculum" (p. 6). This was done very slowly, at first only using graduate students as mentors for the professors, and using workshop methods. The results of the workshops were unfavorable, so they resorted to one-on-one mentoring, where each student was assigned to mentor one teacher. During the intervention, the professors experienced "significant advances in

their adoption of technology and their ability to use technology to improve learning and teaching in their classes" (p. 10).

This book mentions the reasons and theories behind the success of this project. The *Diffusion of Innovations Theory* (Rogers, 2003), *Social Learning Theory* (Bandura, 1977), and the *Concerns-Based Adoption Model* (Hall & Hord, 1987) were the theories that served as the foundation for this program. Inexperienced users of technology are often quickly discouraged because of the countless little gizmos that are essential to make everything work just the right way and the seeming waste of time required in learning all that should be learned. This is where the Diffusion of Innovations Theory comes in.

> Rogers describes five characteristics of innovations that help to decrease uncertainty about innovation: (1) relative advantage – the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than idea that supersedes it; (2) compatibility – the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters; (3) complexity – the degree to which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand and use; (4) trialability – the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis; and (5) observability – the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others. (pp.16-17)

The book states that the more the mentee recognizes these characteristics, the higher will be the rate of adoption of technology that takes place.

With regards to the method of teaching itself and the learning environment, the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) uses the personal, environmental, and behavioral elements to motivate the faculty. The person's expertise in innovation and goal setting; the direct one-on-one mentor-mentee relationship; the establishing of *The Center for Technology in Learning and Teaching* where all the mentoring takes place; and even observation of the other members' progress, are all contributors to the development of the system.

Another method used which is similar to Roger's theory is the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall & Ford, 1987) where the mentees are basically learning what they want to learn. The lessons which are taught by the mentors are the things that are directly connected with what the mentee needs.

That is "why the one-on-one faculty technology mentoring program described in this book has played a key role in the adoption and diffusion of instructional technology in our teacher education program" (p. 25). Its emphasis on "collegial communication and interaction works to expand individual adoption into diffusion of instructional technologies successfully throughout teacher education programs and K-12 environments" (p. 25).

This book makes a number of comparisons with similar projects to their own, and gives some advice to those who want to start similar programs at their own schools. More than half the book gives stories about the different experiences of the participants, and the situations that they were in.

A very timely book, because it meets a very common problem in most schools, head on. It gives realistic suggestions for how to utilize resources to help develop not only the education curriculum and the faculty, but also the students themselves, and the quality of learning that is offered in the academic institution.

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