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REVIEWS: Professional Materials

Robert Hafner
Western Michigan University

Elizabeth Gibboney
Western Michigan University

Sherry R. Myers
Western Michigan University

Jeanne M. Jacobson
Western Michigan University

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REVIEWS

Professional Materials

Science Learning: Processes and Applications.

Carol Minnick Santa and Donna E. Alvermann (Eds.)

International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Road, Newark
Delaware 19714-8139. ISBN 0-87207-366-1. 164 pp. 1991.

Reviewed by Robert Hafner
Western Michigan University

Science Learning: Processes and Applications is described in its foreword as a combination of the “why” and “how” of learning from science texts and materials. The sixteen chapters which comprise the book represent a blending of the theoretical and the practical, the views of science educators and reading educators, and the concerns of elementary, secondary and teacher educators at the college level. Insight into the “why” and “how” of learning from science texts is much needed given the fact that printed text materials remain the most widely used of all teaching aids in the science classroom and that, by and large, science educators do not explicitly teach their students how to read those materials. The authors succeed in providing insight into the “how” of learning from science texts; however, this science educator came away from the book with severe reservations as to “why” much of the existing text material in science should be used by teachers.

The authors share a constructivist view of learning and thus there are a number of themes which run throughout the chapters. Two themes are of particular importance: 1) the role of prior knowledge in the construction of meaning from text and 2) the importance of students becoming aware of, and taking control over, the metacognitive strategies necessary for that

sense-making. Learning from text material is viewed as an active process in which individuals construct meaning by using prior knowledge to help them interpret incoming information. This requires that students become aware of their own understanding (cognitive structure), recognize the organization of knowledge represented in the text, and finally negotiate the nature of the relation between those two entities. The authors provide a number of visual tools for representing knowledge (for example, frames and the Concept Structure Analysis Technique) which can help students in that process. These tools share essential features with the concept mapping techniques with which many science educators are familiar (Novak and Gowin, 1984).

The book is also informative with respect to the metacognitive heuristics and strategies which skilled readers employ to make sense of text material. Such strategies and heuristics are used implicitly by experienced readers and thus need to be made explicit to students. The approaches which the authors advocate to accomplish this appear to fall within the cognitive apprenticeship model (Collins, Brown and Newman, 1989). Cognitive apprenticeship refers to the adaptation of apprenticeship methods to the teaching and learning of cognitive skills. This requires the externalization of processes that are usually carried out internally. Cognitive apprenticeship teaching methods are designed to bring these tacit processes into the open, where students can observe, enact and practice them with help from teachers and from other students. This approach is characterized by three phases: modeling, coaching and fading. In this sequence of activities, the apprentice (student) repeatedly observes the teacher modeling the target process, which usually involves some different but interrelated subskills. The student then attempts to execute the process with guidance and help from the teacher (coaching). Once the student has a grasp of the target skill, teachers reduce (or fade) their participation.

These tools and strategies are largely presented in the context of helping students deal with poorly written text materials. Collectively, the chapters indicate that fundamental differences exist between the nature of science texts and the educational goals those texts are meant to serve. Thus we are told

that very few texts have well written descriptions and explanations of phenomena; when explanations are provided, they are devoid of the context or problem for which those explanations were developed; many questions that are incorporated into texts encourage rote recall rather than meaningful learning; main ideas are either obscured by extraneous information or merely implied within poorly developed paragraphs; texts do not take into account the common alternate conceptions of scientific phenomena which students bring to their reading.

There is certainly value in providing teachers with critical insight into the difficulties which students face in dealing with such text material and this book succeeds admirably in that endeavor. However, it would seem much more productive to incorporate the insights derived from research on reading and science education into the development of pedagogically sound written materials – materials which facilitate meaning-making on the part of students by acknowledging and addressing the importance of prior knowledge, that use concept maps to represent knowledge, and that prompt students to utilize the heuristics and strategies that have proven effective.

References

- Collins, A., Brown, J.S., & Newman, S.E. (1989). Cognitive apprenticeship: Teaching the crafts of reading, writing, and mathematics. In L.B. Resnick (Ed.), *Knowing, learning and instruction: Essays in honor of Robert Glaser*, 453-494. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Novak, J.D., & Gowin, D.B. (1984). *Learning how to learn*. Cambridge NY: Cambridge University Press.

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Books for Children and Young Adults

***The Day Patch Stood Guard;
The Day Veronica Was Nosy;
The Day Sidney Ran Off;
The Day the Ducks Went Skating.***

Written by Elizabeth Laird. Illustrated by Colin Reeder.
Tambourine Books, William Morrow and Company, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016. 1991. ISBN 0-688-10239-5, 0-688-10248-4, 0-688-10241-7, and 0-688-10246-8, respectively. 32 pp., US\$11.95 each.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Gibboney
Western Michigan University

Gosling Farm comes to life when Duncan the little red tractor – protagonist of the *Little Red Tractor* series – ventures out to work. A new adventure comes about each morning when Duncan and Stan the farmer go off to do the daily chores.

In *The Day Patch Stood Guard*, Duncan, Stan and Patch the sheepdog go down to the brook to mend the old bridge. When Stan forgets to set the little red tractor's handbrake, Duncan rolls down the hill and crashes into a tree. While Duncan is being mended, Patch demonstrates his abilities as a guard dog. As Stan and Duncan set out to mend the cow pasture fence in *The Day Veronica was Nosy*, Veronica, a curious cow, unwittingly disturbs an insect nest sending everyone running in all directions. A mischievous piglet and a hungry fox sidetrack Stan and Duncan from their work in *The Day Sidney Ran Off* and *The Day the Ducks Went Skating*.

These pleasing adventures are wonderful read-alouds for early elementary programs. Each story depicts farm life, while colorful illustrations reveal the countryside during each season. A unique feature is the two-page map which appears inside the front and back covers of each book, showing an aerial view of Gosling Farm and the surrounding countryside. These maps help readers follow Stan, Duncan, and their friends as they stumble upon new adventures.



The Pumpkin Man and the Crafty Creeper.

Written by Margaret Mahy. Illustrated by Helen Craig.

Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016.

ISBN: 0-688-10347-2. 32 pp. US\$14.95.

Reviewed by Sherry R. Myers
Western Michigan University

When Mr. Parkin, the pumpkin man, passes Lily Rose Willowherb's house on his way home with a wheelbarrow of dirt, a flowering creeper complains to him of its treatment by owner Lily Rose and hops into the wheelbarrow. Mr. Parkin takes the plant home and puts it in a nice big pot, but the plant is not content. It demands first more water, and then less water, and then entertainment. Appalled that Mr. Parkin does not have a TV, it whines that it will die if it does not have music and dancing, poetry, light, and laughter. Mr. Parkin, who really wants some time with his pumpkins, eventually resorts to renting an orchestra to entertain the plant. Though the plant loves the music, it is still not content and demands that Mr. Parkin forget his pumpkins and read poetry to it instead. Just as Mr. Parkin reaches his wits' end, Lily Rose appears, tells the plant that it has been treacherous and ungrateful, and that it is so tough it is practically a weed. As she leaves with the Crafty Creeper, Lily Rose offers Mr. Parkin a clipping. He declines and returns to the peace and companionship of his pumpkins.

Margaret Mahy's colorful and finely detailed illustrations add greatly to this story of a selfish and demanding plant and the sensitive man who tries to make it happy. The rich detail of the watercolor pen and ink sketches gives the young listeners plenty to engage their eyes as they sympathize with Mr. Parkin. *The Pumpkin Man and the Crafty Creeper* is an engaging story, and can be enjoyed simply on that level. It is also, however, a deft look at people who ask for too much and appreciate too little what they receive. The book could be used equally well in the home or in the classroom. Higher level thinking can be engaged by pondering what else the plant might have demanded had Lily Rose not appeared when she did. Discussion, writing, or drawing could be centered on what children would demand if they were crafty creepers. This is an ideal book for the early elementary grades.

Monster Goes to School
Monster's Birthday Hiccups.

Written by Virginia Mueller. Illustrated by Lynn Munsinger.
 Albert Whitman and Company, 6340 Oakton Street, Morton Grove IL 60053.
 ISBN 0-8075-5264-X and 0-8075-5267-4. US\$10.95.

Little Monster attends a pre-school cleverly peopled with many little monsters of all shapes and colors – one even flies through her day instead of walking. When asked by his teacher to draw something special about his school, Little Monster decides to draw a school clock, and divides his day into pictured sections. He makes sure to include his favorite activities – music, lunch, and going home. Of special interest to young readers will be lunch boxes decorated with the “in” characters for monsters – bats, witches and the like, and the nap-time toys of stuffed creatures.

In *Monster's Birthday Hiccups*, Little Monster's friends are having great fun; however, during a rousing game of “pin the forked tail on the dragon,” the birthday boy succumbs to a case of the hiccups. All the old-fashioned methods are tried, but until he holds his breath and blows out the four candles on his birthday cake, nothing works. Written for preschoolers and early elementary children, the *Little Monster* books are affectionately drawn and should provide much amusement. (SDC)



Fast Forward. Written by Jenny Pausacker.
 Illustrated by Donna Rawlings.

Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016.
 ISBN: 0-688-10195-X. 82 pp. US\$12.95

Reviewed by Sherry R. Myers
 Western Michigan University

Kieran, the hero of *Fast Forward*, is a high energy twelve year old who loves his three sisters and his parents in spite of the fact that they are so laid back. He spends his life tap-tap-

tapping his fingers waiting for them – that is, until Kieran’s grandmother introduces him to her latest invention, the Anti-Boredom Machine (ABM), which he steals from her workshop. The ABM is a VCR remote control device that works on the person holding it rather than on the TV, allowing the owner to fast forward through the boring parts of life and to pause the action, thus being the only one not frozen in time, and to rewind and repeat “the good parts.”

Kieran is delighted... at least to begin with. Fast forwarding through bus stop waits and boring stories told by friends is great; zipping through boring lectures in school or whole class periods with a substitute teacher means school is over in a flash. Then Kieran discovers the down side of the ABM. There is no one to laugh with about the jokes; his friends are angry with him for giving them blank stares and ignoring them while he is on fast forward; rewind makes him dizzy and sick – and besides, he can’t change things when he rewinds, only live them again. Worst of all, he is failing at school from having fast forwarded through too much material. He decides it is time for drastic action and rewinds to do it all again and pay attention.

In a chapter reminiscent of Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, Kieran reviews his past and learns some unpleasant truths about himself. As he reapproaches the day when he got the ABM, he is seized by a new terror: will he reach that point in time and be forced to loop for eternity? With his grandmother’s help and some clever thinking, he manages to break the loop, and he and his grandmother destroy the ABM, leaving Kieran not one second older than when he started his adventure, but definitely much wiser.

Fast Forward is a delightful book. It is short enough to be very manageable for an elementary reader and works well as a read-aloud for children six and up. The joy in reading this book aloud is that it is just as much fun for the adult reader as it is for the listener. Anyone who fast forwards through FBI warnings and previews on movies, who pauses to answer the phone or get a snack from the kitchen, will delight in the idea of being able to control the speed of his or her real life, and so will be

caught as Kieran is, discovering that life at its own pace may be better after all.



Classics Retold

Reynard the Fox. Written by Selina Hastings.

Illustrated by Graham Percy.

Tambourine Books, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016. 1991.
ISBN 0-688-09949-1. 80 pp. US\$16.95.

Selina Hastings introduces her tale of Reynard, the wily fox, with a brief history of the ancient tradition of tales in which animals behave like people, while maintaining their animal characteristics. "In all these stories the plot depends on the principal that brute strength is inferior to wisdom. We know that the Fox, however wicked and greedy, will always get the better of the Lion, however noble, and of the Wolf, however brave..." Hastings' text and Percy's illustrations are well-matched. The story is lengthy and dramatic — enough for bedtime reading over a period of days — and each animal is portrayed lovingly in both words and pictures. (JMJ)

Androcles and the Lion and Other Aesop's Fables.

Written by Tom Paxton. Illustrated by Robert Rayevsky.

Morrow Junior Books, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016. 1991.
ISBN 0-688-09682-4. 40 pp. US\$13.95.

The tale of the slave Androcles, whose courage in pulling a thorn from a lion's paw was later rewarded in a dramatic escape from death in the arena, is the first of ten fables retold in lively rhyme by Tom Paxton. The style of the illustrations is reminiscent of Randolph Caldecott's humorous, grotesquely angular people and animals. This book is not designed for youngsters, but an audience composed of young adolescent readers is likely to be amused, intrigued, and informed. The final illustration, standing alone without text, shows a human figure in the background, tossing a basketball, while a sinister looking wolf, dressed in jacket, chains, jeans and sneakers, departs from the scene in a stealthy manner,

clutching a boombox and pursued by a scruffy-looking bird. Here's an opportunity for readers to create their own modern fable. (JMJ)

Classic Collections

Tales of Edgar Allan Poe

Illustrated by Barry Moser

Morrow Junior Books, 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016. 1991.

ISBN 0-688-07509-6. 312 pp. US\$19.95.

Oscar Wilde: The Happy Prince and Other Stories

Illustrated by Charles Robinson

Morrow Junior Books, 105 Madison Ave., New York NY 10016. 1991.

ISBN 0-688-10390-1. 144 pp. US\$16.95.

Fourteen of Poe's most compelling tales are collected in this impressive collection. Like Poe's stories, Barry Moser's gorgeous, brooding illustrations are hauntingly memorable. On the cover, beneath the author's name in blood red calligraphy, a gleaming blade attached to a pendulum swings toward us out of the darkness. Four paintings accompany "The Murders in the Rue Morgue": a view of the street itself, a horrifying corpse hanging upside down ("Mlle. Camille L'Espanaye, Murdered"), the ourang-outang, and a somber Auguste Dupin. Illustrations for "The Pit and the Pendulum" include a close up vision of a ragged-fanged rat ("Their Red Eyes Glaring Upon Me"); those for "The Fall of the House of Usher" portray "Lady Madeline in Her Coffin" in monochromatic shades of red blending into black, and the mansion itself silhouetted in black against a foreboding red sky. The book is a treasure, which would make a handsome addition to any family library.

A briefer selection of Oscar Wilde's tales — "The Happy Prince," "The Nightingale and the Rose," "The Selfish Giant," "The Devoted Friend" and "The Remarkable Rocket" — is accompanied by Charles Robinson's beautiful, mystical illustrations in many modes: silhouettes, line drawings, illuminated initial letters, and pastel color plates. Artwork underscores Wilde's themes: in the painting captioned "the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates" gleaming, flowery luxury is dominated by a pair of bleak figures crouching in the foreground. (JMJ)