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Imagination and Literacy: A Teacher's Search for the Heart of Learning, by Karen Gallas

Kelly Ryan

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say that the government's role in this discussion is not noteworthy, but the primary focus is not on the classroom. When the focus is in the classroom, it is difficult to see Withrow as a supporter of present-day education. The author claims that the classrooms of today are no different than that of 1900 or 1930.

"The teacher who fails to bring technology to the desk of the learner is failing to practice the high calling of teaching" (p. 53). It is important to note that not all of the different forms of media are isolated; they are interdependent and blend to create a world of knowledge. Withrow fails to mention there needs to be a marriage between traditional instructional techniques with the aid of technology; the world of education cannot live solely on distance learning alone. Overall, there is a disconnect between this book and the world of education. The title indicates that literacy needs to fit itself into the realm of technology, but it is technology that needs to find its niche in the world of literacy. Unfortunately, Withrow fails to make this distinction. While the book does an adequate job of explaining the importance of literacy in education, it disappointingly provides no practical advice for effectively incorporating it into the classroom.

Sarah E. Crosske teaches second grade at Assumption Catholic School in Washington, DC.

IMAGINATION AND LITERACY: A TEACHER'S SEARCH FOR THE HEART OF LEARNING

KAREN GALLAS
TEACHERS COLLEGE PRESS, 2003
\$22.95, 181 PAGES

Reviewed by Kelly Ryan

The author of *Imagination and Literacy: A Teacher's Search for the Heart of Learning* has been in elementary education for over 30 years. Gallas spent the majority of that time teaching in rural and urban public schools. The

author has written three books: *The Language of Learning*, *Talking Their Way Into Science*, and *Sometimes I Can Be Anything*. This most recent book focuses on the imagination as a central component of learning.

Gallas defines literacy as “an ability to work with all kinds of texts, especially those that seem odd or unfamiliar. To be open to what a text offers depends on the action of imagination” (p. 23). The book defines imagination as “a hidden art in the depths of the soul whose true devices nature will scarcely let us divine and spread exposed before our eyes” (p. 167).

At the beginning of the book, the author introduces the reader to a student in the class named Denzel. He began the process of learning to read during his time with Gallas. He was enthusiastic about learning to read, but had difficulty engaging with the text. Denzel had a hard time listening to and reacting to stories read aloud during story time. “Denzel and I have a problem: He won’t listen to story. Won’t look at the pictures either. This just makes me crazy. He’s a good little kid and I can’t for the life of me engage him in story time no matter what book we use or what devices I muster” (p. 13). At first the author thought that Denzel could not enter into a world of imagination, but after many observations, concluded that he entered the world of imagination differently from most children. The observations made of Denzel made the author question what the correlation was between imagination and literacy. The author began “to consider how to gain access to children’s imaginal worlds, how to help bridge the gap between their now and the new worlds of the texts I wanted them to enter” (p. 24).

After many observations of Denzel and the other students in the class, Gallas concluded that some of the children had never been exposed to books before entering school. Gallas goes on to discuss the difference between contextualized print and decontextualized print. Contextualized print includes things that children experience during their everyday life. Signs, notes, letters, and directions are some examples of contextualized print. Decontextualized print includes things that children do not experience in their typical daily life. For Denzel and a few other students in the class, books are decontextualized print. Gallas suggests “the web of literacy begins with the simple act of putting children in your lap each day and reading one, two, three, or more books; with asking them, What did you draw today? What’s happening in the picture?” (p. 84). It is these kinds of interactions that engage children in the imagination and literacy.

One chapter of the book addresses four different approaches to literacy. One approach discusses the organic reading method and the use of key vocabulary for teaching reading and writing. The next approach looks at mastering literacy as a “process that requires a student to master more than language” (p. 63). “True literacy, therefore, is achieved when an individual

begins to live in the body of a subject, identifying with it in a visceral, organic way and translating that identification into action in the world” (p. 64). Another theorist proposes a theory based on “bodyreading” (p. 64). This theory believes that the ability to read is entrenched in each individual’s social, physical, and emotional life. The last approach discusses that participation is “an aspect of social practice, learning involves the whole person: it implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities—it implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind person” (p. 65). Gallas used all of these theories to further explore imagination and literacy in the classroom.

Gallas used all the data gathered from these theories to explore the relationship between imagination and literacy. The author explains that focusing on imagination as a key component of instruction completely changed the classroom. Gallas concluded when literacy and imagination are paired it “can lead to joy, ecstasy, and encounters with the sublime, and that that is what education ought to be about” (p. 167). Children should be open to a world full of curiosity, wonder, joy, and exploration. All of these things can be met with the help of teachers exploring the imagination of their students.

After reading this book, it is evident that the author is dedicated to understanding the minds of young children. The book contains a number of the author’s field notes and drawings from students. It has an enticing, colorful cover that will help to draw the reader’s attention to it, but lacks structure. The information in the book was informative and useful, but not necessarily arranged in a linear manner. For those interested in understanding how imagination relates to the development of literacy, this book would be a great resource. The book would also be useful for elementary and special education teachers. Since reading is an essential aspect of a child’s development, it is vital for teachers to understand the minds of young children. This book would help give teachers an insight into the development of literacy.

Kelly Ryan is principal at St. Peter the Apostle School in Savannah, GA.