

Digital Commons
@ LMU and LLS

Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice

Volume 12 | Issue 2

Article 2

12-1-2008

Teach with Your Strengths: How Great Teachers Inspire Their Students, by Rosanne Liesveld & Jo Ann Miller

Rebecca Spitznagel

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce>

Recommended Citation

Spitznagel, R. (2008). Teach with Your Strengths: How Great Teachers Inspire Their Students, by Rosanne Liesveld & Jo Ann Miller. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 12 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1202112013>

This Book Review is brought to you for free with open access by the School of Education at Digital Commons at Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for publication in *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* by the journal's editorial board and has been published on the web by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons at Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information about Digital Commons, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu. To contact the editorial board of *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, please email CatholicEdJournal@lmu.edu.

someone who has little firsthand knowledge of documentation and authentic assessment, this would be a good introductory text. Catholic schools are just beginning to recognize the advantages to having an early childhood program as part of the elementary school. *Windows on Learning* would be beneficial for administrators and staff implementing new early childhood programs because it provides a good knowledge base with concrete examples.

Elementary educators can use documentation as an additional way to communicate student growth, giving one more leg to the assessment stool when working toward accountability. *Windows on Learning* could make a good professional development text if a school is looking to incorporate authentic assessment. One caution would be that the examples cited are in an early childhood classroom, so upper elementary teachers may not feel it is relevant to them. It would be best suited for K-2. Excerpts from the book could also be used to help educate parents on documentation of authentic assessment.

As a day-to-day how-to reference book, it would not be my first choice. The examples contain too much information, which, while helpful, is not always necessary. A book that could be used every day would be more in outline form, with reproducible templates. This text does not offer them, but overall, *Windows on Learning* is a helpful reference.

REFERENCES

- Helm, J., Beneke, S., & Steinheimer, K. (1998). *Windows on learning: Documenting young children's work*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Meisels, S., Liaw, F., Dorfman, A., & Fails, R. (1995). The Work Sampling System: Reliability and validity of a performance assessment for young children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 10(3), 277-296.

Sharon Alexander is the former principal at St. James Catholic Elementary School in Montague, MI.

Teach With Your Strengths: How Great Teachers Inspire Their Students

Rosanne Liesveld & Jo Ann Miller
Gallup Press, 2005
\$24.95, 205 Pages

Reviewed by Rebecca Spitznagel

“More than a job, teaching is a calling, and teaching with strengths helps educators fulfill their mission of that calling” (p. 13). *Teach with Your Strengths* was developed to help teachers uncover their talents and build their strengths in order to become great teachers. The authors, Liesveld and Miller, are both former educators who now work in the Education Division of the Gallup Organization. They understand the importance of having great teachers in our schools as well as the impact those teachers can have on students.

In this book, Liesveld and Miller attempt to answer the question, “What makes a teacher great?” They began by looking at Gallup’s research and interviews with teachers. “The overarching theme of the results is that great teachers have something that less effective teachers don’t—innate talent for the job” (p. 16). They also found that great teachers recognize and disregard misinformation about teaching and students. Great teachers know that not everyone has the talent to be teacher and not everyone gets better at teaching with more experience. They also know that there is not one magic theory or method that will work with all students because students have unique needs and talents that they bring to the learning experience. Some common themes found among great teachers are the ability to create flexible structure, to share classroom control, and to express their emotions.

Along with presenting this introductory information about great teachers, the book also gives the reader an opportunity to reflect on his/her own experiences. A section is provided for the reader to think about his/her best teacher and answer some questions about that person. This exercise is helpful not only in recalling what made that teacher great, but also in helping the reader learn more about his/her own strengths.

The next part of the book examines how we can measure the effectiveness of a teacher. Liesveld and Miller look at the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) and how it measures the effect of teachers and schools on student achievement. The authors also looked at the work of Dr. Donald O. Clifton, who was an educational psychologist at the University of Nebraska and who later became Gallup’s chairman. During the 1950s and 1960s, Dr. Clifton conducted research to study the effect of teachers and counselors.

The research uncovered a principle that was staggering in its implications: The differences among people influence how they do things. Each individual person has unique, innate tendencies to think, feel, and behave in certain ways most of the time. Gallup calls these prevailing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors dominant talents. (p. 44)

The authors suggest that we should spend our time studying and learning from the best teachers instead of examining what is wrong in weak teachers. They believe that not everyone has a talent to do all things. Instead of focusing on the areas that we are weakest in and trying to improve those things, we should instead focus on our strengths. We should know what we do well and build on those strengths to become truly great.

In order to help the reader identify his or her own strengths, the book is truly interactive because it provides a link to a website (www.strengthsfinder.com) as well as a code that will allow the reader to access the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment. The online assessment takes about 30 minutes to complete and involves choosing which of two statements better describes the participant. The questions are timed to allow only 20 seconds to consider a response and submit an answer. The assessment measures the participant's strengths in 34 different areas or themes and presents the participant's top five themes immediately after completing the assessment.

The next section of the book discusses each theme individually. It describes each theme in detail and looks at ways that a teacher could develop and use each theme in the classroom. Some of the included themes are Achiever, Analytical, Belief, Command, Communication, Competition, Developer, Focus, Harmony, Learner, and Significance. Along with the concrete methods of implementation, each theme also contains some quotes by teachers to describe what that theme might look like in a real-life situation. After completing the assessment online, the reader can then use the book to find his or her top five themes and learn more about each in order to help build those talents into strengths.

In the final section of the book, Liesveld and Miller give suggestions on what to do next. Once you have discovered your talents, the journey is not over. It takes a lifetime to learn how to use and apply those talents every day. They give some tangible examples of how the reader can begin his/her own strengths journey. These suggestions include writing your own personal mission statement and evaluating your successes. They also suggest meeting with a mentor or someone who can help you fulfill your own personal goals. And again they emphasize the importance of focusing on your strengths and what you do well instead of trying to improve your weaknesses.

This book was uplifting and inspiring to read as a teacher. This reviewer thinks that it provided a fun and interactive way to identify personal talents and themes. It also provided a lot of concrete examples that could be developed for use in any classroom. This book would be good for a new teacher as well as an experienced teacher who would like to revitalize his or her classroom and improve student achievement.