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Professional Books of Interest

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Professional Books of Interest

EDITED BY VIRGINIA DANIELS

Dear Readers,

After reviewing this year's MEAP scores I was struck with the still present need to help students develop as writers. Other teachers express a common concern about teaching writing. For your professional reading, we present two reviews of new books by favorite authors and one book by a new name in the field of writing. The books included build on what we already know about writing with children and provide some fresh ways of looking at our practice.

Kelley Zagaïski reviewed *One to One: The Art of Conferring with Young Writers* by Lucy Calkins, Amanda Hartman, and Zoe Ryder White. Kelley describes the structure of the book and what she found to be most helpful. In a review of Nancie Atwell's *A Poem a Day: A Guide to Naming the World*, Marcella Kehus points to what the book has to offer teachers who want to strengthen their writing programs. Finally, I share my discovery of *Notebook Know How*, by Aimee Buckner. In my review I highlight the strengths of this book, the organization of the multitude of strategies included, and a glimpse into the various topics covered.

When looking for some relaxing summer reading, we hope you remember these titles. We are sure you will not be disappointed.

Virginia Daniels
Guest Editor, Professional Book Reviews

Calkins, L., Hartman, A. and White, Z. (2005). *One to One: The Art of Conferring with Young Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. ISBN: 0-325-00788-8 \$24.00.

BY KELLEY ZAGAISKI, PH.D.

When I first got my hands on this book, I couldn't wait to read it. Then I couldn't put it down. As I began to read, one of my first thoughts was, "Finally, a detailed book about what it really means to conference with a young writer!"

Elementary schools everywhere in Michigan seem to have writing as a school improvement goal. Even as educators begin to tackle the commitment of spending more time on writing, we still seem to struggle with how to organize our conferences and how to adapt them child-by-child. I remember feeling frustrated as an elementary teacher when faced with student papers that varied so greatly. Managing conferences, keeping track of each student's strengths and needs, and knowing what to teach and how to teach it to each child is a challenge to primary teachers. Like many teachers, I was always looking for a good resource book about conducting writing conferences.

Well, look no further. In *One to One: The Art of Conferring with Young Writers*, the authors provide us with the practices and principles that create effective conferences. In Part One, they discuss how to organize classrooms for writing workshop. They show some repeatable frameworks to use as a foundation

for writing conferences. They also include strategies for working with English language learners. Part Two is a series of conference transcripts, which Lucy Calkins describes as the best part of this book.

One of the most pressing issues for teachers wishing to adopt the model of writing workshop is how to structure the classroom and the daily schedule to support many constructive conferences. Calkins, Hartman, and White offer many tips and suggestions for structuring this time, including how to address the issue of a child that is disruptive while waiting for a conference. The suggestions for helping this child are particularly useful! I find myself wishing I could go back into the classroom just to try them out.

Organizing for conferences does not need to be a mystery. The framework presented by the authors just makes sense. They describe (and it's modeled, shared, or exemplified in the transcripts) each phase in great detail. You will learn about listening to children during the Research Phase, deciding *what* and *how* you will teach children during the Decision Phase, explaining and giving examples during the Demonstration Phase, and Linking the conference to the child's ongoing work.

Are you looking for a good resource to help you improve your conferences? Reading *One to One* can help you improve the way you teach writing. Most importantly, it can help you teach your students how to improve

their writing. If you teach young writers, then you need to get your hands on a copy. I'm glad I did.

(Kelley Zagaiki, is a lecturer for Oakland University and a private consultant.)

Atwell, N. (2006). *A Poem a Day: A Guide to Naming the World*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. ISBN 0325007462 \$ 65.00

BY MARCELLA J. KEHUS, PH.D.

"Everything I want to teach about writing begins in poetry ... diction, precise choices of words ... choosing subjects that matter or the importance of reflection or the development of theme ... how to polish writing and how to revise it and how to organize it ... what punctuation does or the importance of strong nouns and verbs ... or how readers need inviting leads and conclusions that resonate ... that starts with poetry." Thus, in the DVD's introduction of this three-component program, Nancie Atwell makes the case for poetry as the core shared experience of her class.

So exactly what does one get in the trilogy? There is an incredible anthology of poems, a "how-to manual" describing how the poems work daily and overall through the year in Atwell's writing workshop, and a DVD, which provides a full video reviewing the program and lesson format and seven full lessons in Nancie Atwell's classroom.

In both the book and the DVD, the author lays out the context of daily teaching as "a poem a day" with four key features. After the teacher introduces the poem with what Atwell calls "Setting the Stage," each day begins with a daily poem. Also for each poem the teacher is equipped with "Some Features To Notice," to point out for students as they are directed to go back to the poem and mark and annotate it upon closer reading. Students also are asked to take a given "Response Stance" to respond in writing. Finally a "Benediction" closes the lesson by noting the poem's key features or place in the writing workshop.

Just the anthology is an amazing compendium of more than 200 poems, chosen both for their connection to adolescents and for their demonstration of great writing. The poems are primarily from a varied and refreshingly modern canon. There are a handful of classics I knew and far more by authors I'd not read but loved immediately. There are also a good

number of poems created by Atwell's students. At first, I thought these might be disruptive, but instead I found them quite good and think my students would like to see what others of their age can do and have done. The respect for students' work is so great that their poems are treated no differently from Shakespeare or Marge Piercy; each is printed within a thematic unit (e.g. Growing Up, Metaphors) and is offered with the same four features noted above.

Programmatically, it is important to remember that Atwell's students also continue to thrive in both reading and writing workshop. At first glance I'd describe the *Naming the World* set as the latest installment of what I consider staples of any writing workshop—especially for teachers of middle grades and middle school—rounding out what Nancie Atwell started with *In the Middle* (1987) and made even more practical with *In the Middle: New Understanding about Reading, Writing, and Learning* (1998) and more concrete with *Lessons that Change Writers* (2002).

And for those of us who don't have an 80-minute block to work through these poems daily for the entire year ... well, we now have plenty of great poems to choose from and a few years' worth of writing lessons!

References

- Atwell, N. (1987). *In the middle*. Boynton/Cook.
 Atwell, N. (1998). *In the middle: New understanding about reading, writing, and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, Boynton/Cook.
 Atwell, N. (2002). *Lessons that change writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, FirstHand.

(Marcella J. Kehus, is an assistant professor at the University of Toledo.)

Buckner, A. (2005). *Notebook Know-how: Strategies for the Writer's Notebook*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers. ISBN 1-57110-413-5 \$15.00.

By VIRGINIA DANIELS, Ph.D.

Having read almost every book available for teaching writing, I was not sure what to expect from *Notebook Know-How*. Ralph Fletcher recommended this book earlier this year while speaking in Macomb County. I took the time to pick it up and read it, which was accomplished easily in one busy weekend. What makes this book different? Aimee Buckner, a fourth-grade teacher, writes from a teacher's point of view. As I read each chapter, I felt like I was sitting down and having a conversation with her. Amazingly, Buckner includes answers to all my questions, as if anticipating what I might wonder. By the end of the book I was not only excited about using the ideas with my students; I was also excited about getting back into my own writer's notebook.

Aimee Buckner's vision of teaching is one of continuous decision-making. This book helps teachers understand what decisions are necessary to launch and maintain writers' notebooks in their own classrooms. The book is organized into seven chapters and includes an appendix of templates.

The first two chapters provide a framework for getting started with notebooking, including strategy lessons on launching the notebook and building writing fluency. The next three chapters provide strategies to add meat to the notebook while focusing on expanding topics, author's crafts, and genres. Chapter 6 includes creative lessons for editing to make the process more enjoyable and approachable for both students and teachers. The final chapter discusses how the notebook can be used as an assess-

ment of student writing and included in students' writing grades.

Each chapter has the same organizational structure, making it easy to read. Each begins with an introduction of the topic. Buckner pulls from research, life experiences, and classroom stories to prepare the reader for the rest of the chapter. Next, strategy lessons are presented as brief individual stories that model how the lessons were taught in the classroom. Examples of student work are provided. These are often followed by examples of follow-up lessons or suggestions for working with a child who is experiencing difficulty with a lesson. Each strategy is then presented again in a figure that includes the How, Why, and Extensions for that strategy. All chapters end with section that pull the strategies together and communicate Buckner's thoughts on the topic.

If you want to try writers' notebooks for the first time or refresh how you use a writer's notebook, this book is your answer. The author provides excellent strategies with useful lessons and templates for the entire process. Buckner's inclusion of how to encourage students provides the reader with solutions for how to make a strategy work when it seems to be failing with a particular student. When reading *Notebook Know-How*, you will feel like you have been invited into the classroom of a seasoned teacher. Accept the invitation and enjoy the visit.

(Virginia Daniels is a special lecturer for Oakland University and Title One teacher for Fraser Public Schools.)