

Professional Development

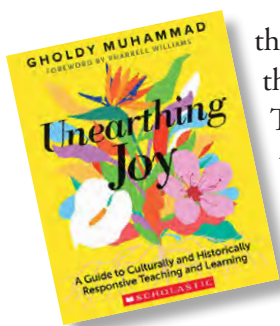
Sophie Degener, Adelfio Garcia, Ivy Sitkoski, and Martin Mireles

About this Column

Teaching and learning in today's classrooms require teachers to make their pedagogies culturally and linguistically responsive. The resources below provide enlightening resources teachers can rely on to meet their students' cultural and language needs. For instance, the book by Gholdy Muhammad, *Unearthing Joy*, delivers many resources that engage readers in recovering their teaching joy. Although all recommended readings illuminate and guide teachers and educators to understand and appreciate students' cultural and linguistic assets to enhance their academic lives in and out of school, we encourage our teachers and educators to entice their colleagues to join in their venture to continue supporting their students, especially those different from the mainstream.

Reading, Writing, and Comprehending in a Culturally Responsive Teaching World

Muhammad, Gholdy. *Unearthing Joy: A Guide to Culturally and Historically Responsive Teaching and Learning*. Scholastic, 2023, 224 pp. ISBN 978-1-3388-5660-6.



When I ask teachers to share their “dream literacy classroom,” they often have a hard time. Their dreams more often have to do with what they don’t see than what they do see. They are blocked in imagining what’s possible because they are overwhelmed by their current constraints: standardized testing, scripted curricula, lack of materials, etc. Gholdy Muhammad’s much-anticipated new book, *Unearthing Joy*, is an antidote to that problem because it dares to dream boldly about what education could be.

The book is a joy to read. It is brightly colored, with a visually appealing layout, and music, art, and poetry are embedded throughout. Every chapter has an accompanying playlist that readers can download and listen to while they read. It builds on Muhammad’s Culturally and Historically Responsive Education (CHRE) framework that she introduced in her first book, *Cultivating Genius*. This framework helps teachers plan instruction that supports what she refers to as the five pursuits: (1) identity, (2) skills, (3) intellect, (4) criticality, and new to this book, (5) joy, which Muhammad believes should be the ultimate goal of teaching and learning.

In her introduction, Muhammad mentions the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scores, particularly those of Black children, and wonders if this is a problem with our students or a problem with our literacy curriculum. She asks, “Which one needs the ‘intervention’ or ‘remediation,’ *the child or the system*” (p. 16). Clearly, Muhammad believes it is the system and includes ways of challenging that system in this visionary book so that our schools will better meet the needs of *all* of our children.

In Part I, Muhammad emphasizes the importance of teachers learning about themselves and

their own identities while also learning about the historical contexts of literacy for Black and Brown people. As in her previous book, she shares the deep roots of literacy among African Americans that flourished even while our country dehumanized and oppressed them. She asks teachers to reflect on and unlearn the oppressive practices that have been normalized in education. She also makes clear that teachers who are unwilling to do this work, who are unable to see the genius and gifts that *all* children bring to school, and who view them only through their deficits, should not be teaching.

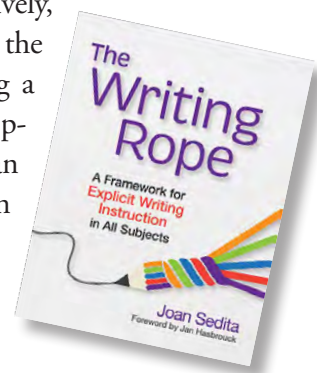
In Part II, a 10-step plan for designing and teaching curriculum that embeds the five pursuits is provided. All curriculum design should start with the students—getting to know them and assessing them equitably. Muhammad provides guidelines for assessments that go beyond skills, looking at how we can assess identity development, intellect, criticality, and joy. Additional steps for curriculum development include creative drafting, modifying teaching and adjusting, and reflection. Readers will appreciate the multiple examples of curriculum units and lesson plans that embed the five pursuits across grade levels. Importantly, Science of Reading proponents will see that their efforts and Muhammad's are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, in Muhammad's vision, all students will learn foundational skills that are connected to multicultural literature, students' lives, and social justice, making those skills all the more pertinent and meaningful.

Muhammad's book is a revelation. She has an amazing vision of what education can be, for all students, and she dares us to dream big as well. I can't possibly include all the a-ha moments I had while I read this, but I do know I will be sharing this book with my colleagues. Every chapter begins with questions that will push readers to really interrogate what they have come to know and accept about education and students. Reading this together with colleagues is recommended as every part of every chapter

will push your thinking and invite deep discussion. I cannot recommend it enough. —SD

Sedita, Joan. *The Writing Rope: A Framework for Explicit Writing Instruction in All Subjects.* Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2023, 226 pp. ISBN 978-1-68125-589-7.

To teach writing effectively, it is crucial to understand all the processes involved in creating a piece of writing—from grasping a pencil to composing an extended literary analysis. Joan Sedita presents a comprehensive instructional framework for teaching writing in all content areas based on four research reports. Overall, it is an excellent English-language resource for research-based writing practices that can be applied immediately. The book provides the materials to accompany instruction as well.



Dr. Sedita begins with an introduction to the five components of the writing framework: (1) critical thinking, (2) syntax, (3) text structure, (4) writing craft, and (5) transcription. Concurrently, she details the different parts of the research that lead to the creation and implementation of the framework. She then explains how to implement the framework using a Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, which involves providing explicit instruction on writing skills and strategies while differentiating to meet students' needs.

The book is divided into three distinct sections. The first section details the research and basic foundations of writing; the second section describes how students should learn to write; and the third section explains the process of writing to learn content.

One of the book's strengths is the author's discussion of how the writing-to-learn process can be utilized to think critically and enhance disciplinary content learning. In Chapters 9 and 10, Dr. Sedita provides examples of

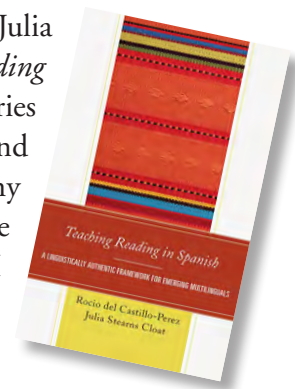
different strategies and techniques that can be used to gather information to express and refine an understanding of the content area. Consequently, the students are also given the tools to refine their writing practices through various tasks that simultaneously help build knowledge.

Another highlight is Chapter 6 in which Dr. Sedita details building syntactic awareness through constructing specific syntax and sentence skills. As metalinguistic awareness is key to students' success in biliteracy, syntax knowledge must be built explicitly but often with various supports. The book lays out the basics and provides examples of different activities to increase students' syntactic awareness, like sentence combining, unscrambling sentences, expanding kernel sentences, etc. As Dr. Sedita states, "When students are familiar with the rules of grammar, they can grasp the meaning that comes from the interrelation between words in sentences" (p. 60). Referenced as well, a text's complexities often lie in the syntactic structures of sentences, so a student that is able to analyze and comprehend those structures has a better chance of comprehending the text.

If you are providing writing instruction, this book breaks down the writing processes with instructional activities that help develop a student's writing skills. To reiterate, everyone is a teacher of writing within their content area. From graphic organizers to checklists, the author provides a variety of instructional resources for all educators. However, this book could have been strengthened by the author including another essential research study from the Institute of Education Science (IES) titled *Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School* from 2014. It would have complemented the book's research-based approach to teaching writing and provided a more comprehensive and well-rounded resource for educators, especially those working with emergent bilinguals. —MM

Castillo-Perez, Rocio del, and Stearns Cloat, Julia. *Teaching Reading in Spanish: A Linguistically Authentic Framework for Emerging Multilinguals*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2022, 168 pp. ISBN 978-1475864687.

Rocio del Castillo-Perez and Julia Stearns Cloat's book *Teaching Reading in Spanish* brought back memories and instances where my wish to find a methodology or system to help my students and I learn in their native language was nowhere to be found. I am happy that today's bilingual and dual language teachers and monolingual (English) teachers have this resource available to expand their knowledge and the ways to teach and learn in Spanish.



Through their book, Castillo-Perez and Stearns Cloat's empowering message suggests a linguistically authentic framework for emergent multilinguals. Their book includes five chapters where the newest term, "Science of Reading," allows the readers to think of what that means for emergent multilinguals. Also, the book contains four appendices highlighting the voice of other languages and literacy experts' knowledge on teaching reading in Spanish. They include tables containing a plethora of information on aspects of the reading development continuum. In Chapters 3 to 6, the authors introduce and explain their reading framework instrument (called DCC) to leveling lectura development. According to the authors, their DCC lectura's leveling instrument is aligned with the Spanish version of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

In thinking of the diversity of ELs and MLs across classrooms along with the increase of dual language programs, this book highlights possibilities for handling Spanish and English equally (biliteracy). I'm confident that readers will find this resource an excellent addition to their repertoire of teaching strategies

and methodologies to simultaneously develop reading in Spanish and English. It is essential to mention that the contributors to this book provide a thorough understanding of the complexity of teaching in Spanish. Each contributor offers their perspective and details their knowledge of teaching reading in Spanish within their area of expertise, offering their support of Castillo-Perez and Stearns Cloat's book.

I invite all bilingual, dual language, and monolingual teachers to dive into this resource (written in English) to continue building their pedagogy for students learning to read in Spanish. I also encourage those teachers teaching reading in English to use this resource with Spanish-speaking students whose linguistic backgrounds are engaged when learning in English. The instructional framework designed by these authors builds on students' best assets, language, and culture, understanding that students bring all their linguistic resources to classrooms, utilizing those resources when engaging in learning in Spanish and, in some cases, in English.

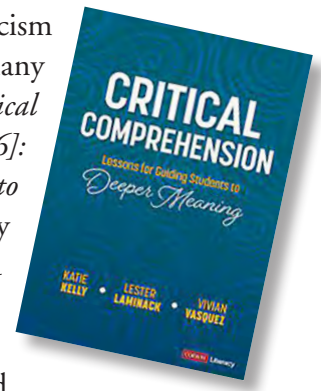
I mentioned that I wish this resource had existed when I began teaching decades ago, but there is always time to continue learning to teach in Spanish, especially now that we give Spanish the same value as English. Therefore, engage in this resource quickly and get your educator friends into learning and expanding their learning to teaching in Spanish. The world is becoming smaller, and the number of simultaneous bilinguals continues to grow in today's classrooms. We educators must have the tools to teach and empower students that speaking Spanish is essential, and it is equally important to read, write, and speak Spanish well in this small world. —AG

Kelly, Katie, Laminack, Lester, and Vasquez, Vivian Maria. *Critical Comprehension [Grades K-6]: Lessons for Guiding Students to Deeper Meaning.* Corwin Press, 2023, 272 pp. ISBN 978-1-0718-7933-7.

Confronting systemic racism is a huge task for which many resources are needed. *Critical Comprehension [Grades K-6]: Lessons for Guiding Students to Deeper Meaning* is definitely a resource that can be added to our growing list. Kelly, Laminack, and Vasquez argue that to make informed decisions, children must be taught to question text as most of us were not. They lay out a framework and provide supplies and tools for using books to reveal the diversity of the world to students and to develop the students' awareness of the pervasiveness of biases in what they see, hear, and read. This book adds to our repertoire of approaches for one of our most important undertakings.

The first step in the endeavor, to explore our own literacy histories, is explained in the beginning of the book. We must examine our biases and the limits of our perspective before we begin teaching to gain personal insight into what factors shape ideas. We need to continue the self-examination throughout the teaching process and share our thoughts with the students to provide a model for them. Kelly, Laminack, and Vasquez provide a set of thought-provoking guiding questions that many of us may never have considered asking ourselves. For myself, for instance, when was the first time I ever questioned what I read in a text? Certainly not until I was in college. The authors' framework, detailed in the first chapter, guides students to start questioning text as early as kindergarten.

Most of the rest of the book is structured as a series of lesson sets, each exploring a slightly different aspect of critical comprehension. The lesson sets include selected texts with



accompanying discussion questions and projects. Some of the projects involve oral and written reflection, and some projects lead students to take authentic action based on their developing understanding. The following is one of my favorite projects (I wish I had space to describe all of them!): Kindergarteners composed alternative text for Raffi's *Baby Beluga* after learning about whales' endangerment and shared the new text with all of the kindergarten classes in their school. In the lesson sets, students explore their own identities and such concepts as perspective, stereotypes, and bias. Each lesson is based on a different text. During the lesson, students are first engaged in an uninterrupted read-aloud called a *movie read* to get an overall sense of the text, then *reading with the text* to dive deeper, and, finally, *reading against the text* for critique purposes. The discussion focuses on such issues as who is featured in a text and who is invisible, who benefits and who is harmed by a portrayal, what counter-narratives there are, and where alternate perspectives might be found. Reading and discussion of additional, related texts help students to acquire authentic, nuanced understandings of history, of unfamiliar cultures, and of current-day challenges.

Resources within this book are abundant. They include lists of texts recommended for deeper diving, websites that serve a variety of

purposes, other resources found by scanning QR codes, and colorful images of picturebook covers and student work. I highly recommend this book to K-6 teachers who are striving to grow students who are well-informed, empathetic, and ready to take action to change the world for the better. —IS

About the Authors

Sophie Degener is an associate professor in Reading at National Louis University. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in literacy, and her research interests include early literacy, family literacy, and teacher education. Adelfio Garcia is a biliteracy consultant to Chicago Public Schools and Chicagoland school districts. He received his doctorate in Reading and Language from National Louis University, and his research interests are in the areas of biliteracy, translanguaging, family literacy, language development, and methods of teaching literacy in Spanish. Ivy Sitkoski is an adjunct professor and student teaching supervisor and field coach at National Louis University. Her research interests include early literacy, comprehension, and culturally responsive teachings. Martin Mireles, our new co-author, is the District Instructional Coach–Biliteracy Specialist for Cicero District 99. All serve as school district consultants and are frequent presenters at local, state, national, and international literacy conferences. If you have comments about this column or suggestions of books to review, please send them along to Sophie Degener at sophie.degener@nl.edu.

Mission

The mission of the Illinois Reading Council is to provide support and leadership to educators as they promote and teach lifelong literacy.

Vision

The Illinois Reading Council advocates quality literacy opportunities for all learners and serves as a primary organization that provides educators at all levels access to research, materials, and methodologies to promote and teach lifelong literacy and learning. Support of an active, well-organized system of local and special interest councils and state committees provides a viable network for communication, exchange of information, and grassroots involvement of a diverse membership. The Illinois Reading Council's publications, special projects, conferences, and workshops stimulate the personal and professional growth of educators.