

## **Book Reviews**

*Educational Alternatives for Everyone All the Time.* A new organization, the International Association for Learning Alternatives has published the above title. It was prepared by Dr. Don Glines, one of America's premier reformers about schools. Dr. Glines' was principal of the Wilson Campus School considered the most innovative school in America. This readable book's 200+ pages brim with ideas, examples of alternatives, research, history, rationale and a huge bibliography. This resource book dispels the myth that alternatives are for maladjusted students. Obtain this highly recommended book for just \$25 (member cost \$20.) including shipping from IALA, 605 W. Marie Ave., St. Paul, MN 55118 or 651-335-3988.

*Passion for Learning: How Project-based Learning Meets the Needs of 21st-century Students* by Ronald Newell. In a wonderfully brief and readable book Newell provides a rationale for project-based learning from brain research, multiple intelligences, and progressive education. He describes project-based learning through the work of individual students at the Minnesota New Country School where the entire program is project-based. The book includes a form for students to outline their projects, rubrics for judging projects, a project checklist and an evaluation form. Highly recommended. Available from Scarecrow Education Press, Inc. 2003.

*Creating Brain-Friendly Classrooms: Practical Instructional Strategies for Educators* by Lowell Biller. This brief readable book takes a careful look at how the brain works and provides specific strategies for use in the classroom. Biller has written for this newsletter and the book provides abundant practical advice on applying what is known about the brain to learning. Recommended. Available from Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2003.

*Saving Our Students, Saving Our Schools: 50 Proven Strategies for Revitalizing At-Risk Students and Low-Performing Schools* by Robert Barr and William Parrett. This 500 page book, despite its bulk, is an enormous resource of practical interventions the authors have ferreted from vast fields of research and practice. Recommended. Available from Skylight Professional Development, 2003.

*Inciting Learning: A Guide to Brain Compatible Learning* by Joan Caulfield and Wayne B. Jennings. This new book is brief and highly practical by offering many suggestions for busy teachers and others. The authors emphasized what teachers can immediately do to increase student learning and interest. The ideas are based on major brain-based learning principles that help students become responsible citizens, productive workers and lifelong learners. The book is published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, available for \$8.50 to NASSP members and \$11 to others.

Another Planet by Eleanor Burkett, HarperCollins Publishers, 2001. Following Columbine, the author, after many turndowns, convinced administrators in Prior Lake, Minnesota to permit her to spend the 1999-2000 school year observing everything that went on a suburban, successful high school and to record her findings into a book without censoring. The author uses real names of the building, teachers and students in a high

school which sends a high percentage of its students on to higher education and has high achievement test scores.

For nine months, she attended classes, talked with students, sat in on teacher conversations and interviewed both parents and administrators while observing the daily activities. It's a revealing insider's view into the lives of teenagers in and out of school, teachers and principals. You may have to conclude it describes the ultimate condition of American high school education as seriously out of touch with reality.

Burkett shows the wonderful things that happen in school but for the most part, school represents "another planet" for its students. As a former high school principal, I found the author's descriptions true to life and all too familiar—from the self-selected student groupings, the beginning teachers struggling with order and lessons and veteran teachers who ran their departments with an iron hand.

In reading the book, I had the overwhelming and uneasy feeling that there was no way anyone could substantially change the scene. The traditions, procedures and rules are simply too strong to do anything more than make slight modifications at the margins. High schools, indeed, have people that want to change and equal or more others who do not want to change the system. Their discussions are little more than a tight dance called institutional gridlock. That, in fact, is a history of high school change. The institution's instructional processes are essentially the same as they were 100 years ago.

This is the reason why we need institutional bypasses rather than trying to change an outdated and set-in-concrete organization. It may be possible to bring change by breaking up large high schools into independent small units if we give them total decision-making authority over budget, staffing and the program. Another approach is to establish alternative schools and charter schools giving them the power to create new models of education.

Another Planet is a must read book for those who wish to think seriously about secondary education by looking at what actually happens in real high schools. We're not talking about troubled schools in this instance. That exacerbates the issue. Burkett has made an outstanding contribution to understanding the conventional "successful" high school in this readable, important book.