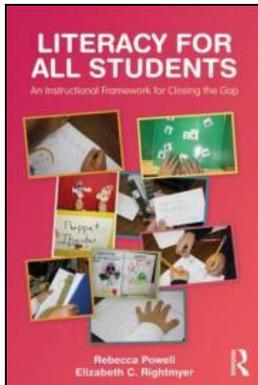


## Professional Book Review

Powell, R., & Rightmyer, E. C. (2011). *Literacy for All Students: An Instructional Framework for Closing the Gap*. New York: Routledge. 269 pp., ISBN: 9780415885874. \$41.95.

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In *Literacy for All Students: An Instructional Framework for Closing the Gap*, Rebecca Powell and Elizabeth Rightmyer present a view of literacy that is the antithesis of standardized and prepackaged versions. Students are, after all, humans—anything but standardized—differing in language, experiences, and history. The authors argue that standardizing students' literacy instruction narrows their experience to what can only be described as inauthentic and ineffective (p. 93). They base the book largely on the idea that “literacy is innately social,” requiring dialogue and relationship (p. 1).

The author's passion for literacy that empowers students instead of limiting them comes from their successful professional experience. Powell, professor of education at Georgetown College, Kentucky, and Rightmyer, professor of education at University of Louisville, Kentucky, are both involved with important literacy research projects, including the statewide Read to Achieve project. These two authors approach culturally responsive instruction with passion and vigor, which comes from working within *praxis*, defined by Freire (1970) as “a combination of reflective thought, dialogue, and action in order to change or transform society” (as cited in Powell & Rightmyer, 2011, p.235).

Often educators, in the field, are frustrated by educational books because the suggestions presented are in reality *just not possible* due to the overwhelming demands on their time. *Literacy for All Students* impressively speaks to this issue, presenting the high expectations of teachers to create safe, empowering learning communities while acknowledging an understanding of the unfortunate reality that standardized tests are negatively impacting students of color and English Language Learners. Because of this realism, Powell and Rightmyer have presented an approachable piece that creates a sense of confidence in a teacher—*I CAN create a culturally responsive classroom*—with a sense of urgency—*I MUST create a culturally responsive classroom if I want to meet the needs of my students*. Ideally, the high expectations of the teacher are then relayed to students—*You CAN do this school stuff, and you MUST. Most importantly, I am here to help you*.

Based on components of the *Culturally Responsive Instruction Observation Protocol (CRIOP)*, a framework for assessing teachers in meeting the literacy needs of diverse learners, the book is organized into three parts: The

Sociocultural Context of Literacy Instruction, Core Instructional Practices, and Becoming Critical. Each of these sections is rich not only with research, but also with practical application. The authors include narratives called “Teacher Voices” and valuable, thought-provoking reflective activities at the end of each chapter. The book’s target audience is the practitioner, who will benefit from the balance that is maintained between theory and practicality.

*Literacy For All Students* argues that “learning is as much social as it is cognitive” (p. 7), and therefore it is the teacher’s responsibility to create classrooms that respond to the unique cultural and affective needs of the students. This theme is powerfully conveyed in Section Two, which is made up of four core instructional practices suggested for use by teachers who are already, or are interested in, developing culturally responsive classrooms. Chapter Five, “Culturally Responsive Assessment,” emphasizes the value of formative, dynamic assessment for marginalized students. It advises teachers on appropriately implementing the ideas in their own classrooms, specifically by using such techniques as “kidwatching,” writing portfolios, and running records (pp. 100-101). Further, while explaining these techniques in a user-friendly voice, the writers attend to the strong theoretical backing of each activity.

One of the major themes of the book is family as an integral part of the learning experience of the child (p. 2). Chapter Four presents this idea in detail, explaining the difference between parent involvement and parent partnerships. Involvement, Powell and Rightmyer claim, is the traditional understanding of a parent’s role in education. The norms of the school say that parents come to conferences, participate in PTO/PTA, and support the student *from home*. On the other hand, the authors differentiate typical parent interactions from a culture of respect found in partnerships between parents and teachers that are founded on commitment to the child. What does such a relationship look like? It is a teacher going to a community event that is important to the student’s family (p. 74). It is the family feeling empowered to teach the teacher something about their child (p. 76). This chapter in the book does not obscure the difficulty attached to developing such relationships; however, it also offers supporting research, as well as practical advice for teachers—yes, even busy ones.

In the introduction, Powell and Rightmyer cite the components of the Culturally Responsive Observational Protocol (CRIOP) as providing the organizational structure for the book. The book is a useful guide for teachers working to implement culturally responsive practices (p. 5). The tables at the end of each chapter are quite user-friendly, showing the contrast between a culturally responsive classroom and one in which these practices are not occurring. However, the book would be even more useful as a guide for teachers if it included more details related to the CRIOP. To use the components of an assessment of which a reader most likely has no prior knowledge can create a sense of ambiguity. Terms such as “caring,” “classroom climate,” and “empowerment” all have an abstract quality, which would be solidified if readers were provided with examples of how those terms are assessed.

That being said, *Literacy For All Children* is a worthwhile read, challenging teachers to rethink best practices and reminding them that instruction should speak to the lives of the students. After reading this book, teachers will be able to approach literacy with balance, “which includes meaning-centered and literature-based instructional activities as well as explicit instruction in specific skills” (p.161). By valuing and validating students of diverse cultures, teachers empower them to live up to their own great potential and challenge cultural norms.