

NEW READS***Diary of a Bilingual School***

Written by Sharon Adelman Reyes & James Crawford

Reviewed by Robert Leos, Ph.D.

Years ago, I directed a bilingual teacher training program that I considered a learning laboratory. All participants, including students and faculty, tried to sort out what works in the bilingual classroom and what does not. As a graduate student under the guidance of Dr. Theodore Andersson, I continued to study features that separate effective bilingual education programs from less effective ones. After much research, I was convinced that only lucky combinations of factors create an effective learning environment for English language learners.

Diary of a Bilingual School by Sharon Adelman Reyes and James Crawford illustrates that luck has very little to do with learning. The authors describe a year in a dual immersion program at the Inter-American Magnet School in Chicago, a school that has garnered national attention for its success in dual immersion. Readers learn quickly, however, that this book is not just about teaching students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Diary of a Bilingual School is about how children learn. It is about self-discovery and students' inherent abilities to learn on their own and in partnership with supportive teachers, parents, and classmates. Using easy and fun-to-read small slices of life in the classroom, Adelman Reyes and Crawford guide readers through concepts of education and human development usually reserved for academia. Intertwined with their descriptions of how the students learned about worms, spiders, and life cycles, are the authors' explanations of the constructivist concepts used to create the learning environment in this classroom.

They illustrate the "student-centered" approach in which the classroom's physical arrangement helps to facilitate curiosity and learning. Included throughout the book are sidebars that provide succinct explanations of why the stu-

dents' experiences led to learning.

It is clear from **Diary of a Bilingual School** that students at the Inter-American Magnet School learn in an environment with motivated and knowledgeable teachers and supportive parents. How different this is from the many schools across the country that value test scores over what children actually learn. How different this is from schools where teachers and principals must subscribe to the notion that schools are responsible for "feeding" students from a checklist of what they are supposed to learn, with a test score as the sole measure of learning.

So what are teachers in a restrictive, accountability-based classroom to do in order to guide students' learning rather than feed students content from a standards checklist? Can teachers be facilitators of learning as described by Adelman Reyes and Crawford and survive in an environment driven by test scores? Many teachers must ponder these questions on a daily basis as they do their best to facilitate learning in such an environment.

Diary of a Bilingual School shows readers how students can learn in optimal conditions, such as those at the Inter-American Magnet School. For teachers in less than optimal conditions, the

book provides a wealth of information about how students learn, with numerous examples of classroom experiences that every teacher can apply to make learning more enjoyable for their students. **Diary of a Bilingual School** is a wonderful resource that should serve as a reminder to everyone that children love to learn. We just need to let them.

[Diary of a Bilingual School](#) by Sharon Adelman Reyes and James Crawford, ©2012

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