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Professional Materials

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Professional Materials

Language Arts: A Process Approach. Written by Pamela J. Farris. Times Mirror Higher Education Group, 2460 Kerper Blvd., Dubuque, IA 52001. 1993. ISBN: 0-697-15094-1. 384 pp. US\$47.85

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"I teach because it is what I enjoy. Teaching is what I do best. And, most of all, teaching is what I love." These words from the preface of Farris's book are sure to lead education majors into the text with confidence — confidence that *this* textbook can make a claim that it was written by someone in higher education who can not only talk the talk, but can walk the walk.

Language Arts: A Process Approach is unlike any other textbook I have examined. There is a sense of contagious enthusiasm within the book. It is truly a teacher's text. Among the things that set this text apart are several pages of full color photographs, most of which are vibrant and exciting with the potential for creating interesting discussions. In addition, several work samples of children's writing are contained within the chapters on spelling, grammar, writing, and handwriting. These samples provide a fine opportunity for analysis since many undergraduates do not have access to children's authentic writing. Having these samples incorporated into their textbook allows education majors to apply what they are reading and discussing in a timely fashion.

Farris includes sections titled "in the classroom" in every chapter of the book. While it is not uncommon for language arts texts to provide activities for the classroom, I find the ones in this text to be superior. They are current and can be easily adopted into any classroom. "Focus boxes" are a feature of the text which offer a brief explanation or elaboration on a specific concept. They present information in an organized and clear manner focusing on such topics as Bloom's taxonomy, genres, and teacher-student conference guidelines.

It is important to point out that while the title of the book may seem to ring of whole language, the text itself provides a balanced view of the teaching of language arts. The inclusion of a separate chapter on grammar should help traditionalists feel that they have not been excluded. Overall impression of the chapters is one of thoroughness, providing evidence of the author as scholar, researcher and practitioner.

Farris opens each chapter with a thought-provoking quotation that fits with the chapter so perfectly the reader is forced to consider how much extra time and effort put into this one small facet of writing her book. This is but another way she allows the spirit of a true teacher to shine through.

A final feature worthy of attention is the "fingertip reference section" included at the end of the text. An array of significant resources for teachers are made available here including names and addresses of major journals in the field, a listing of all Newbery and Caldecott medal and honor winning books by year, a list of multicultural children's books by culture, and some key titles of resource books for teachers.