

10-1-1978

We Suggest

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Recommended Citation

Buelke, E. (1978). We Suggest. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 19 (1). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol19/iss1/16

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

Smith, E. Brooks, Goodman, Kenneth S., and Meredith, Robert.
Language and Thinking in School
New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976. Pp. x + 438.

The authors of this revised text believe that a language-thought-centered view of teaching and learning is a sound base for curricular and instructional strategies and tactics in all subject areas. Consequently, the book is designed to synthesize many studies and views about the nature of language and processes of thinking. The excellence of the writing in this volume; the appropriate, functional organization of its major theses; the breadth of scope, yet detail and clarity of concepts, positions, and educational implications presented; and the creative exploration of many relationships among language, thought processes, and education bring a "fresh view to old educational problems" and "open new pedagogical prospects." It is a book that could well be used by teachers throughout a wide range of classrooms, encompassing nursery school through secondary education. As a background for understanding and assessing the value and potential of both curricula in action and proposed new programs, it is a valuable resource for use by school administrators of curriculum and professors of teacher education.

Discussions in the book are organized under seven major headings: Language and the Person; Language and Knowing; Grammar in Perspective; Oral and Written Communication; Reading; Literature, Mathematics, and the Arts as Presentational Forms; and Language and Thought in Teaching. In each section, the first chapter presents theories, concepts, and thinking from pertinent disciplines, including much background from research in each area. In subsequent chapters, earlier practices, as well as up-dated and innovative strategies, are reviewed and explored for their potential in promotion of language-thought-centered teaching. On a separate page preceding each section, items for teacher focus are noted. Throughout the rest of the section, key recommendations for teachers are highlighted in italicized print. At the close of each section, practical, stimulating suggestions are given for "Testing Ideas Against Reality" and "Turning Ideas Into Practice." Challenging teachers to involve themselves and their pupils in exciting, action research in their own classrooms.

In each of the seven sections, the pervasive theme, linking language with thinking, is re-emphasized, re-examined, and made the focus of all discussions of curriculum and instruction. Language makes it possible for people to conceptualize their worlds and, in turn, gains vitality through their grasp of reality. Language is the carrier of experience and to confirm, enrich, and encourage it is to enlarge and extend the boundaries of learn-

ing. For peoples of the world to learn together and to live together creatively and productively, they need a healthy respect for the possession and use of their own dialects, for other languages, and for the past histories of both. Language learnings need to be continued in school as the mastery of language begins in the home—in real situations. A cardinal precept has been suggested: “No language without experience and no experience without language.” Expansion of learners’ language to serve their communicative needs, rather than presentation of a neat, prescriptive package to be mastered for credits or grades, appears more successful in improving effectiveness of language and promoting interest in its use, both in functional and creative ways. If children are to achieve well in language usage, time must be taken to provide a stimulating, varied, interactive human environment so that the whole process of speech-thought may be nurtured. Only a milieu of challenging, substantial concerns of children will create the need for significant communication, followed by increasingly competent responses.

If, as these authors believe, “reading is the active process of constructing meaning from language represented by graphic symbols systematically arranged,” then every reading teacher becomes a language teacher also. Effective teachers of reading must have the interrelationships between language and thinking as their ultimate, deepest concerns. Sharing the companionship of children, together they can rediscover “the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in,” helping each child to maintain what Rachel Carson calls:

. . . a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, . . . an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strengths . . .¹

To this end, these authors have described and suggested many ways to help keep alive the inborn sense of wonder in children’s learning, believing truly that:

The child is surely at the center of the learning process, for he will only learn what he can incorporate into his knowing. The teacher is certainly at the center of what will be taught, for he alone can prepare the environment and set the stage for instruction. *But language is central to the interaction of teaching and learning that produces knowing.*

¹ Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 42-44, 88.