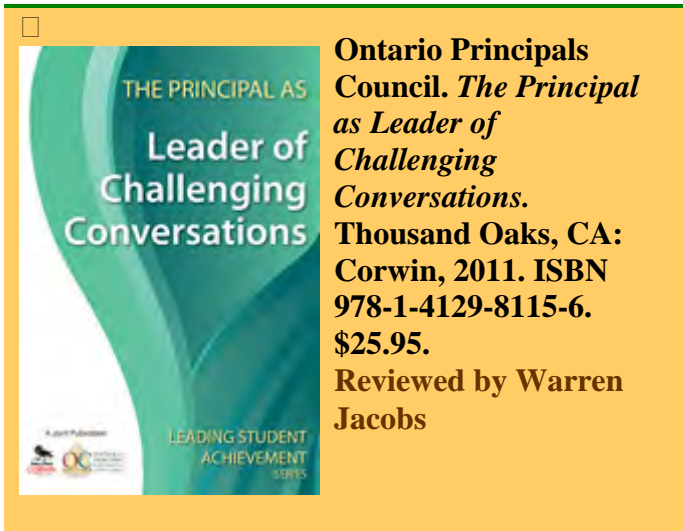


# Book Reviews



**Ontario Principals Council.** *The Principal as Leader of Challenging Conversations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2011. ISBN 978-1-4129-8115-6. \$25.95. Reviewed by Warren Jacobs

Principals are challenged to solve problems, lead school improvement programs, supervise school employees, and maintain positive relationships with superintendents, school boards, parents, volunteers, teachers, and staff. One of the primary responsibilities of school administrators is to successfully manage difficult conversations.

The Ontario Principals Council joined with Corwin to publish *The Principal as Leader of Challenging Conversations*. This title is part of the Leading Student Achievement Series consisting of hands-on guides for principals developed from workshops on a specific topic. *The Principal as Leader of Challenging Conversations* includes eight chapters that utilize case studies, questions, annotated lists, and suggested resources to promote understanding and further study.

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction to challenging conversations. A bulleted list of the factors that may determine conversational difficulty include differing viewpoints, misinterpretation, fear, fatigue, and a belief by one or both parties that the conversation will result in negative consequences. Challenging conversations furnish the opportunity for principals to model appropriate behavior and provide skilled leadership.

The text includes a number of scenarios that help the reader to understand the pressures that principals face in their day-to-day work. To avoid the confrontational ambushes and misunderstandings described in chapter 2, principals can follow a script called the critical path (figure 2.3). While shown in a linear design, the critical path allows for flexibility. If the conversation reaches an impasse, the two parties return to the point where mutual understanding existed to begin the process of finding additional common ground.

The ability to manage difficult conversations is enhanced by listening for meaning, avoiding distractions, paying attention to nonverbal cues, identifying underlying feelings, and reframing dialogue to allow for consideration of other viewpoints.

Principals seek collaboration to further the educational programs at their school. Effective feedback can promote stronger professional ties and enhance collaborative efforts. Chapter 4 lists the elements of feedback and the barriers that are encountered.

Sometimes principals are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Frustration, misunderstandings, or personal problems are some of the reasons why angry, hostile people may unload on school administrators. Principals need to be assertive and know their rights and responsibilities. Chapter 5 discusses the steps that principals can take to remain focused and calm during heated conversations. Strategic use of nonverbal communication, repetition of key points, acknowledgement of criticism and truth, request for specific feedback, building on existing agreements, and demanding and modeling civility help when dealing with an aggressive person.

When anger becomes personal, dissonance prevents productive discussions. Principals are required to deal effectively with anger in the best interests of

the school and its students. School administrators are encouraged to focus on problem-solving rather than personal issues. Postpone confrontational discussions until the anger subsides and the other party can reason effectively. While anger may be a normal reaction to frustration or emotional upset, professionals learn to control their anger.

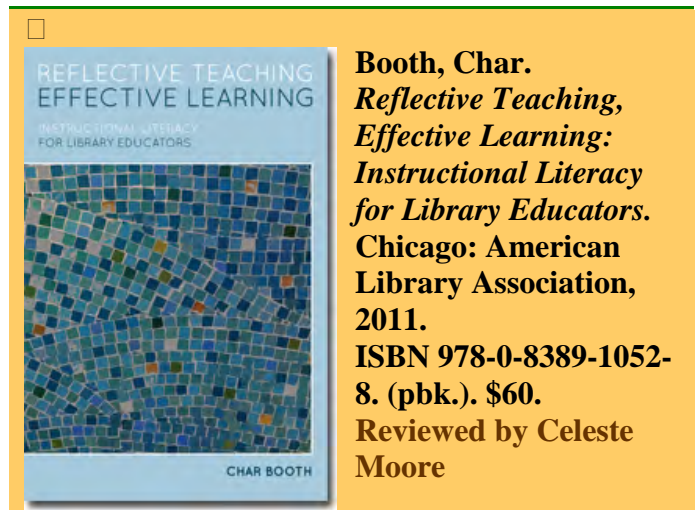
Principals will benefit from an understanding of their preferred conversational style (avoiding, competing or confronting, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating). Thoughtful strategizing ahead of time facilitates conversational choices that avoid an automatic reaction that might lead to trouble. Timing, place, personal preferences and skill level, commitment, and desired outcomes affect conversational strategies.

Chapter 8 begins with a scenario in which the principal attempts to mediate a dispute between two teachers. Serving as an intermediary is a skill that is both challenging and essential to the successful operation of a school. Mediation can change relationships. While the two parties may not become friends, they can work more effectively after the resolution of their dispute.

The text concludes with key concepts to remember, resources including case studies and activities, references and other suggested readings, and an index.

*The Principal as Leader of Challenging Conversations* will be useful for administrators, teachers, and others working in education. The organization of the text, and the use of case studies, lists, figures, and study questions enhance the presentation of information. A principal will definitely want a copy for his/her professional library. This title will be an excellent addition to academic library collections, and useful as a textbook for courses focusing on educational leadership.

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Char Booth's *Reflective Teaching, Effect Learning* is a much needed publication designed to help librarians further their instructional literacy. Increasingly librarians are taking on the role of educators, yet many lack the background to comfortably meet this new demand. The author recognizes the need to help librarians as they assume greater instructional roles. Her inspiration for writing the book is captured in the following statement. "Librarians of all stripes and design deliver instruction every day, yet we rarely receive the training, mentorship, and expertise it takes to hit the ground teaching." The information contained in this book will help librarians in all areas of librarianship achieve greater success as educators.

Booth is the E-Learning Librarian at the University of California at Berkeley. She has won awards for her leadership and technology initiatives. The author blends her knowledge of current trends in library science with her mastery of instructional literacy to aid present day teacher-librarians. Her expertise uniquely tackles the teaching dilemma that many librarians are grappling with today. This book pragmatically works to help librarians meet their instructional goals.

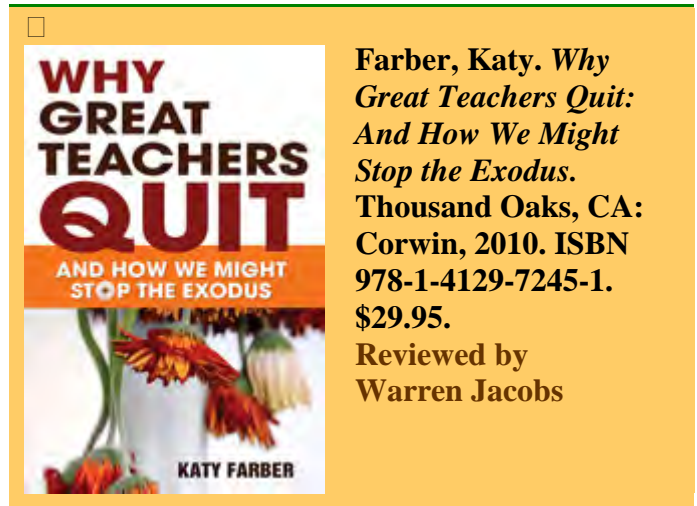
The author presents her ideas about instructional literacy in a four-part framework. These parts include Metacognition and Reflective Practice, Learning Theory, Teaching Technologies, and Instructional Design. The author also presents and explains the USER (understand, structure, engage and reflect) method of instructional design. This

method can help librarians build student-focused instruction. In addition, Booth offers helpful tables and other visuals to further explain concepts. The book also contains a comprehensive reading list, two appendixes as well as a helpful glossary of terms. The author's approach is realistic while providing the reader with necessary tools to become more confident and fluent educators.

The book covers many aspects of instruction. The need for instructional literacy among librarians is illustrated throughout the book. The author invites the readers to reflect on their own educational experiences and design student-centered instruction. The tools that Booth provides will help librarians develop their own educational philosophy, gain confidence, implement effective instruction and assess the effectiveness of the instruction. Librarians are urged to find their own unique style and passion for teaching. The author is clearly at ease in her role as teacher-librarian and strives to encourage others to also embrace their teaching roles.

*Reflective Teaching, Effect Learning* is a powerhouse of information for librarians assuming instructor roles. The author has written a solid reference built on extensive research and personal experience. Booth helps librarians work towards instructional literacy. This book is highly recommended for all teacher-librarians. A must read for librarians looking to further develop their teaching styles and gain instruction fluency.

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**Farber, Katy. *Why Great Teachers Quit: And How We Might Stop the Exodus*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2010. ISBN 978-1-4129-7245-1. \$29.95. Reviewed by Warren Jacobs**

A colleague's decision to quit teaching prompted Katy Farber to investigate the reasons why accomplished teachers are prematurely leaving the classroom, and how this trend might be reversed. In *Why Great Teachers Quit: And How We Might Stop the Exodus*, Farber says that 20% of new teachers abandon the profession in their first year while 60% depart within five years.

Many beginning teachers are dismayed to find that student motivation, parental support, compensation, school climate, and workload do not correspond with preservice expectations. In contrast, teacher education program graduates imbued with critical thinking and problem solving skills flourish as educators.

*Why Great Teachers Quit* is not meant to be a scholarly treatise. Farber's research began with her blog on the reasons for teachers' departure or continuance in the profession. The author then conducted lengthier interviews with educators throughout the United States.

The text is comprised of eight chapters featuring interviews, recommendations from teachers, and vignettes of inspiration. The reader will find tables, charts, and a listing of print and online resources to facilitate understanding.

Chapter 1 looks at the impact of standardized testing on teaching schedules and learning outcomes. A scenario in which highly frustrated students are struggling to complete a writing

examination demonstrates the mostly negative effects of the testing culture. Learning time is disrupted for test preparation, adversely affecting the development of higher level thinking skills and graduation rates. Teachers are encouraged to become advocates for classroom-based measures of achievement.

Poor working conditions may consist of environmental health issues, violent students, or the lack of adequate time for lunch or a bathroom break. A lengthy list of recommendations to address these and other problems is found in chapter 2.

School districts are facing severe budget shortfalls. Many educators are threatened with burnout and major health challenges due to an unceasing workload that encroaches upon personal or family time. The author endorses wellness activities to promote healthy lifestyles and coping skills. Teachers expressed their desire for opportunities for relevant professional development and collaboration with colleagues.

Chapter 4 examines the contribution of bureaucracy to the issue of teacher dissatisfaction. Examples include a teacher who plans a field trip during her lunch and prep periods only to receive criticism and complaints from parents, a committee that stifles a creative idea, the delay of a purchase order for needed supplies, and teachers' lack of input into policies that directly affect classroom instruction. Farber advises educators to take the lead in developing policies for internal evaluation using action research.

A culture of disrespect and martyrdom exists in America's schools. Government inadequately funds education. Educators are expected to make up the shortfall by working on their own time and paying for classroom supplies and technology from their salaries. Teachers are poorly compensated in relation to their educational attainment and responsibilities. Teachers must respectfully say no to unpaid work and funding classroom expenses.

Chapter 6 features the ten things that parents can do to support their child's self-esteem and learning (p. 106). A parent-teacher relationship is a

collaboration built on positive communication, kindness, and support.

Administrators are struggling to keep up with the primacy of testing, discipline problems, supervision of staff, collaboration with teachers, and communication with parents. Principals need help from mentors to learn how to balance the endless responsibilities inherent in their role.

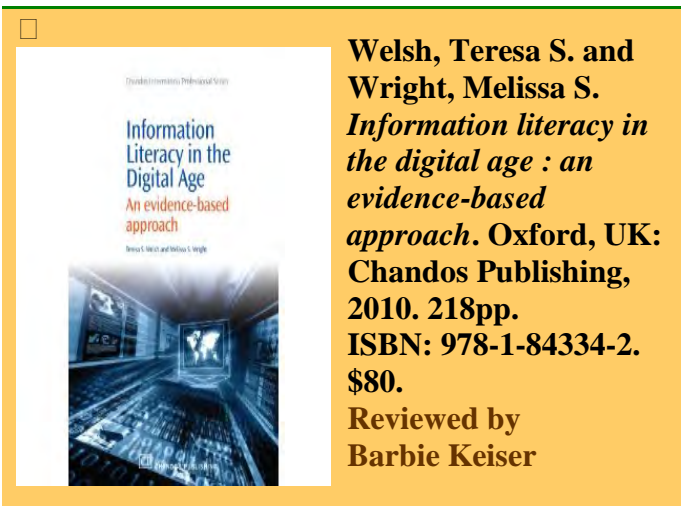
The final chapter addresses the need for teachers to join with the school board in the development of policies on instruction. Teacher input is vital as school board members may not be knowledgeable about the teaching and learning process.

The text concludes by describing educators as dedicated visionaries striving to improve their skills and knowledge. Farber offers a list of suggestions for teachers and the educational leaders, policy makers, and politicians with whom they will communicate and collaborate. Her goal is to reduce the problem of teacher attrition by improving the learning and working conditions in schools.

*Why Great Teachers Quit* is a timely and valuable look at a critical problem. This text is a welcome addition to any library's collection. It should be read by all concerned stakeholders. Farber's interviews are both poignant and informative.

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**Welsh, Teresa S. and Wright, Melissa S.**  
***Information literacy in the digital age : an evidence-based approach.*** Oxford, UK: Chandos Publishing, 2010. 218pp. ISBN: 978-1-84334-2. \$80.  
 Reviewed by **Barbie Keiser**

This book had all of the hallmarks of being an exceptional read:

- A publisher, Chandos, whose Information Professional Series is generally practical and authoritative, with works that “have been specially commissioned to provide the reader with an authoritative view of current thinking. They are designed to provide easy-to-read and (most importantly) practical coverage of topics that are of interest to librarians and other information professionals.”
- An intriguing title, *Information literacy in the digital age*, with a subtitle indicating that the work would be grounded in real-life learning experiences
- Two authors who are well-qualified in the subject matter at-hand: Teresa Welsh, Associate Professor at the University of Mississippi School of Library and Information Science, and Melissa Wright, instructional services librarian at Rowland Medical Library at the University of Mississippi (and doctoral candidate in adult education at the University of Southern Mississippi)
- A detailed Table of Contents—over five pages, including the lists of figures and tables
- Each chapter ending with exercises, additional readings, and notes.

As I got to the end of the book, I realized that it was not the authors’ fault that I disliked the book, but their editor’s! The book cried out for an introduction telling me about the target audience. For whom was this book intended? It was never really clear, making it difficult to evaluate. Also, an introduction could have explained why an evidence-based approach is appropriate in dealing with this subject matter. To my mind, the fact that there were exercises at the end of each chapter indicated that it was to be used as a textbook. Reformatted as a workbook for high school, perhaps.

**Chapter 1, *What is information literacy?***, “serves as a foundation for an evidence-based approach to teaching information literacy,” reviewing existing (and evolving) models. The chapter closes with a section emphasizing why it is important to be information literate today.

**Chapter 2, *Cultural literacy***, defines culture and why cultural literacy is so important; how one becomes culturally literate; and how one can increase awareness of one’s own history and culture.

**Chapter 3, *Library literacy***, gives the reader a history of early libraries, from Babylonia and Egypt to Greece and Rome, describing the major categories into which we place libraries today--- school, public, academic, special, national, and archives---and the role of libraries in today’s society. Number of roles that the authors envision for libraries? Two: to collect and preserve information; provide access to information. Why libraries are important? First, if information is not preserved, it’s lost, and second, information is power.

**Chapter 4, *Library literacy***, continues with a review of information source types (primary, secondary, tertiary); reference sources; how resources are organized, classified, and catalogued; and how one can search for materials in a library catalog.

**Chapter 5, *Ethical literacy***, concentrates on scholarly materials, how to distinguish scholarly

journals from popular magazines, and why plagiarism is wrong.

**Chapter 6**, *Network literacy*, describes a database and how one can conduct effective searches by employing Boolean logic, nesting (search terms), wildcards, and truncation.

**Chapter 7**, *Computer literacy*, goes through the five ages of the computer (Pre-mechanical age; Mechanical age; Electro-mechanical age; Electronic age, and Digital age) and five generations of computers (vacuum tubes, transistors, integrated circuits, microprocessors, and artificial intelligence).

**Chapter 8** picks up the *Network literacy* discussion through an explanation of the development of the Internet and World Wide Web.

**Chapter 9** covers *Media & Visual literacy*, including computer-mediated communication (cmc) netiquette.

**Chapter 10** focuses on *Government literacy*---the United States, for example, is a federal republic with a strong democratic tradition written constitution and Bill of Rights. Its three branches are the Executive, Congress, and Judiciary. That's all it says!

**Chapter 11** covers *Financial literacy* by describing a credit report and how to compute compound interest. The chapter is three pages excluding one for exercises and one with additional sources and notes.

**Chapter 12** walks the reader through "writing a term paper," including a short grammar checklist and sample research paper format.

**Chapter 13** concludes with nine "top tips for evaluating information on the web."

**Appendix 1** is perhaps the most useful part of the book—*Information Competency Assessment Instrument*—and it's not even the authors' work, but a reprint from Rodney Marshall's 2006 article, "An instrument to measure information

competency," published in the *Journal of Literacy and Technology: An Academic Journal* (<http://literacyandtechnology.org/volume7/marshallJLT2006.pdf>)

**Appendix 2**, *Information Literacy Assessment Trial Study of Students in the 11<sup>th</sup> Grade in Mississippi*, is by Janet Boswell, University of Southern Mississippi, August 16, 2007.

**Appendix 3**, *An Examination of the Scholarly Literature Related to School Libraries and Their Impact on Student Achievement*, by Glenda Ford, University of Southern Mississippi, December 1, 2009.

**Appendix 4**, *A Bibliometric Analysis of Scholarly Literature Related to Information Literacy and Critical Thinking*, by Linda Matthews, University of Southern Mississippi, December 1, 2009.

The press release from Neal-Schuman Publishers that accompanied this book states that the book "will provide librarians and information professionals with a thorough background and understanding of crucial information literacy concepts they need to teach all learners." It does not.

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