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Curenton's "Conversation Compass: A Teacher's Guide to High-Quality Language Learning in Young Children" (Book Review)

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Confucius for Christians: What An Ancient Chinese Worldview Can Teach Us About Life In Christ,

by Gregg A. Ten Elshof. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015. 109 pp. \$15.00. ISBN 9780802872487

Reviewed by Rebecca H. Givens, MLIS student, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL

Confucius for Christians is not a book promoting eastern mysticism, nor does it advocate compromising Scripture. It does not deal with Confucianism as a religion. Instead it advocates looking at life with a body of knowledge and history that is bigger than western wisdom tradition based on Plato, and that includes the eastern wisdom tradition of Confucius. "It's rather an attempt to give expression to those ideas in the Confucian tradition that have been helpful for me as I've tried to make my way further up and into the Way of Jesus" (p. 7). Each chapter (Family, Learning, Ethics, and Ritual) begins with a quote from the Analects and a quote from Scripture, and uses literary references and examples from life to illustrate how the Confucian tradition can lead to a deeper life in Christ. This thought provoking book is devotional in nature. It would be a good introduction to eastern ways of thinking. The author is a professor of philosophy at Biola University.

Conversation Compass: A Teacher's Guide to High-Quality Language Learning in Young Children,

by Stephanie M. Curenton. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 2016.
90 pp. \$17.95. ISBN 9781605543840

Reviewed by John E. Palmer, Assistant Director, Reference and Circulation Librarian, Southwestern Assemblies of God University, Waxahachie, TX

Curenton is Associate Editor of *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* and Associate Professor at Rutgers University. Curenton describes the book as "a conversation-based instructional approach designed to build children's critical thinking, problem solving, social reasoning, and language skills" (p. 2). One of the book's main goals is to show teachers how to help "children who speak African American English" and who "are at risk to be misdiagnosed and inappropriately referred to special education programs" (p. x). The book offers instructional methodologies to guide classroom discussions: Conversation Feedback-loop; Question Trail; Conversation Compass; Conversation Map; and Tracking Peer Conversations (p. 3). These methodologies will "help with strengthening the language-learning environment" in classrooms, especially in places where the "home language" differs from that of school (p. 4).

The book explores the hallmarks of good conversation, cultural conversational differences, and partnering in conversation. The book provides forms and ideas to improve in these areas, along with transcripts of sample conversations from actual studies.

Subsequent chapters cover “encouraging instructional peer conversations;” “planning instructional peer conversations;” and “monitoring the progress of instructional peer conversations.” The book also contains an appendix with six reproducible tools.

Curenton’s writing is clear and the sections and subsections have labels that help one parse the information for ease of understanding. Key ideas are presented in the margins to help reader’s quickly review information.

This book advocates getting the students involved in conversations to improve communication and reasoning abilities. Curenton advocates guiding conversations along “academic reasoning paths” through visualizing aspects of conversation (p. 53). The questions and ideas promote attaining learning objectives from this new look at an ancient paradigm. Helpful, this book is recommended for those that work with ESOL and early childhood education. Our chair of the teacher education program gave it a “thumbs up.”

Creating a Beautiful Mess,

by Ann Gadzikowski. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 2015.

156 pp. \$15.95. ISBN 9781605543864

*Reviewed by Addison M. Lucchi, Library Assistant,
MidAmerica Nazarene University, Olathe, KS*

Ann Gadzikowski has over twenty-five years of experience working as an early childhood educator – and her knowledge on the topic is evident in this well written and fascinating book, which provides excellent information on the value of play in a child’s life. This book demonstrates how raising a child is not solely about parents giving them right or wrong answers – but also about cultivating joy in their child.

In *Creating a Beautiful Mess*, the author invites readers into a fond reminiscence of their own childhoods, in order to evoke memories of their own joyful play experiences. While some aspects of play may have changed from when we were children, Gadzikowski remarks that “the essential play experiences are timeless” (p. 2). The main substance of the book consists of detailed chapters on each of ten