

Review: *But How Do You Teach Writing? A Simple Guide for All Teachers* by Barry Lane (Scholastic, 2008, 200 pp.)

Thomas Hansen, past Illinois State Supervisor for K-12 Foreign Language Programs, Illinois State Board of Education

This is an older book written by a very popular professional development expert with a great sense of humor and dynamite ideas for teaching writing. Lane has written a dozen other books both alone and with other experts on the teaching of writing. Although the book is not new, it does contain lots of goodies.

I often grab professional development books from the boxes at thrift shops and dig through those volumes to see if there is something interesting. I think Lane's work is very interesting because for one thing: he understands the writing process very well. I enjoyed his approach found in this particular book. I will not give away all the content here.

Lane also understands teachers, the demands placed upon them, the external obsession with forms of assessment that do not necessarily correlate with high-quality teaching methods and the daily grind of trying to help students write (and learn) better. Lane has experience in the classroom and has served as mentor, visiting writing consultant, and educator. He has great ideas and a great sense of humor.

His jokes and his wit combine to make a very entertaining read here. He has also an incredibly highly tuned sense of outrage about irony. Teachers who "know better" and who have "been through the mill" will enjoy how he attacks some of the most ironic nonsense involved in trying to teach students.

Lane also understands students, including young ones. While most of what he says is best for elementary school levels, there is also information suitable for high school, college, adult ed, and community writing programs. His candor and experience help him deal with the personalities of emerging writers and with students "groaning" about assignments.

I recommend the book for your library, whether you are a classroom teacher, a teacher who deals with writing instruction specifically, a teacher educator in writing and language arts, or just somebody interested in improving how you teach and/or write. There are lots of darn good ideas here, in a straightforward, accessible, and down-to-earth package.