

## IN PRAISE OF American Educators



*And How They Can Become Even Better*

Dr. Richard DuFour

### EDUCATION

*In Praise of American Educators: And How They Can Become Even Better.* By Richard DuFour. 2015. Solution Tree Press. (ISBN 978-1-942496-57-1). 286 pp. Paperback. \$29.95.

Educators get beat up almost daily in the press. As educators, busy in the classroom, do we have time to gather data to support what we know and see every day? Dr. DuFour has done that for us. He presents positive ways to think about the negatives attributed to our educational system and, especially, teachers. There are ample references to reinforce his statements. Only one page refers to science education. Here the author relates the lack of content knowledge of science teachers in the United States: “No other industrialized country allows its teachers to teach subjects for which they have not been highly trained.”

Chapter titles are enticing: “Educators under Attack,” “The Phony Crisis,” “The Firings Will Continue until Morale Improves,” “A Word about Teacher Unions.” These early chapters include

descriptions of the successes of the American education system and critique the strategies our government is using to bring about change. The reader is reminded that our educational system is intended to educate all students, unlike other countries’ systems. This is definitely a challenge. He asks: “Why should we commit to learning for all? In the first part of the book, he relates “that current American educators have helped students reach unprecedented levels of achievement.” However, he stresses “the need for dramatic improvement” because “the implications for students who are unsuccessful in school have never been more dire.” Six reasons for change are emphasized, with supporting data:

- “We Must Prepare Students for Their Future, Not Our Past”
- “Those Who Have Not Learned How to Learn Will Be Left Behind”
- “We Must Preserve the American Dream as the Land of Opportunity and Social Mobility”
- “We Are Falling Behind the Rest of the World”
- “Our Current System Isn’t Working”
- “There Are Serious Implications for Those Who Fail”

There is not enough space in this review to present all the supporting data for each of these. Here are just two:

- “In 1973, only 28% of jobs required postsecondary education; by 2020, 65% of jobs will require postsecondary education.”
- “In the next 5 years, six million Americans are at risk of being locked out of the middle class.”

The author, a strong proponent of “Professional Learning Communities” (PLC), sees this approach as central to improving our students’ education. The last half of the book lays out a blueprint for establishing viable and strategic changes in our system. He urges all educators to evaluate PLC but warns that a half-hearted buy-in will not bring about any

positive change. He provides strong arguments for making the change to PLC.

For science educators, the book provides information about current and future trends in education in general. The author points out some major weaknesses in our current system, and some of his statements are difficult to see in print. One of these is especially difficult for a science teacher to accept: “In the United States, teaching has long been considered an easy-entry occupation with a low bar and a wide gate for entry.”

The first four pages of the book are devoted to what experts are saying about it, followed by a two-page Dedication, a two-page About the Author, a five-page Foreword, and a three-page Introduction. These 16 pages provide a framework for the author’s thesis, but this reviewer found it overbearing.

If you are interested in the U.S. educational system, its history, current state, and ideas about changing the system, this is a good book for you. The author presents information in a clear manner and with references to support his statements.



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### PLANT BIOLOGY

*An Illustrated Glossary of Botanical Terminologies: An Easy Approach to Plants [sic] Terms.* By Hasnain Nangyal. 2015. Bentham Science Publishers. (ISBN 978-1-68108-095-6). 165 pp. eBook. \$39.00

The copy reviewed was “watermarked” as “Review Copy: Not for sale,” so it is not clear whether this is a final edition or a beta release. As is the nature of the electronic publishing business, updates are easy to produce, which makes a review at least potentially (maybe likely) focused on a moving target.