

Book Review

Coleen Foley, Guest Reviewer

A Review of Claire Botterill's *Pottery For Life: A Guide for Beginning Potters and Those with Special Needs*

Starting with the first sentence and continuing to its last, "yes, even you can do this" project, Claire Botterill's *Pottery for Life* maintains a sense of integrity that I generally would not look for in a how-to guide. Bearing in mind that I do not take this

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claim of "integrity" lightly, I mean to convey that this work is personally honest, true to purpose, has a high degree of soundness, and completely conveys the author's love for her craft and audience. With that said, I recommend this book to lovers of pottery, to those who teach pottery, and to anyone wanting concrete information on how to offer pottery classes for persons with disabilities.

In support of my claim that this is an integrated piece of work, I need only to point readers towards the book's 200 beautiful photographs and 25 detailed illustrations. Directions provided in each of its seven chapters contain high quality photographs of the necessary steps in the process. Project illustrations direct the user in the following manner: trace the given template, enlarge by 150%, cut 4; template will measure 6 5/8 in wide. A person who could not draw a white cat

in a snowstorm would be able to easily duplicate Botterill's project patterns.

Throughout the guide Botterill explains each project with precise detail. The following excerpt serves as an example of her understanding of her reader and students: "it is very easy to assume that people know what you mean but forgetting the odd little detail can lead to someone not achieving their best results, or even having a disaster on their hands (p.8)."

Written in plain English, Botterill defines the technical details, equipment, and machinery, for each pottery lesson. She includes tips and tricks including: how to buy and store clay, reasons and method of *wedging* or kneading the clay, the importance of eliminating air bubbles and keeping the clay pliable, and adjusting the consistency of the clay to the needs of the learner. Using anecdotes from two decades spent working with a wide variety of special needs learners, Botterill provides goldmines of insight into how to use clay to help people relax, build confidence, and in her words "let go and forget what society expects of them (p.10)."

Botterill stresses that the book covers an evolution of techniques which she developed over her years of working in a variety of institutional workshops and settings with mentally ill, physically handicapped, or developmentally disabled students. Botterill continuously emphasizes how important it is to help students produce something they are proud of, something that has a professional appearance, and something they can take home. I see this statement as a metaphor for all in-

structors who take pride their ability to motivate students to be more creative and ultimately more satisfied with their lives.

Botterill also considers the lack of equipment and resources. This information may be especially significant for those teaching in institutional settings. Differentiating between the "essential" and the "desirable" is particularly helpful in determining the start-up costs for a pottery class. Further, she identifies a host of household items that can serve as substitutes for items sold by professional vendors. For example, when a slab roller is too expensive, use a rolling pin. A clay extruder can be fashioned from an empty canister that once held sealant and the purchase of an inexpensive sealant gun. Other easily found items include: a garlic press or a hand sieve for making hair or grass, sponges, an old dart for cutting and drawing into the clay, inexpensive paint brushes, table knives, forks, an old potato mashers, plastic bowls and old margarine containers. Within the discussion of tools, she adds very im-

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portant safety tips. Each project description contains tips to ensure the project does not fail; like when to keep the hands wet and the paper dry, how to adapt a process to the unsteady hand, or how to modify a project for the person with limited mobility.

Botterill's stated goal in writing *Pottery for Life* was to "to help enrich people's lives through communicating methods and

ideas of working with clay in a way non-potters can follow with ease and pleasure (p.7)." The result is a guide that in one hundred and twenty five pages includes sound basic information about pottery construction and thought provoking insights into how to approach and work with a disabled learner. I recommend this book without reservation.

Available from University of Pennsylvania Press, 4200 Pine Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-4011; Phone: (215) 898-6261; Fax: (215) 898-0404; website: <http://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/contact.html>; e-mail: custserv@pobox.upenn.edu.

Ordering Information:
ISBN: 0-8122-1796-9
Paperback, 2001, 128 pages \$24.95

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Opening Doors to the Future: Preparing Low-achieving Middle Grades Students to Succeed in High School

Many students lack the knowledge and skills necessary for doing high-school-level work, and they do not have the study skills needed to meet higher standards in ninth grade and beyond. Middle schools and high schools increasingly are creating safety nets and special programs to help students make the transition to grade nine. This publication contains 15 examples of transition programs that work in raising achievement and keeping students in school.

Closing the Achievement Gap: A High Schools That Work Design for Challenged Schools by Gene Bottoms

The High Schools That Work (HSTW) school-reform model offers schools and school systems a unique opportunity to help students acquire the problem-solving, communication, academic and technical skills they need for further study and the workplace. This publication outlines a modified HSTW framework designed specifically for "challenged" schools with high percentages of students who are performing below acceptable standards.

Influence of School Practices on Students' Academic Choices

This report looks at the relationship between students' academic choices and the extent to which guidance counselors and teachers help students plan their high school programs. It also examines how guidance counselors' and teachers' encouragement affects students' academic choices.

What School Principals Need to Know about Curriculum and Instruction

By Gene Bottoms

Superintendents and local school boards can no longer be satisfied with principals who simply place teachers in classrooms, provide textbooks and get students to attend schools. Increasingly, schools and school leaders are being held accountable for the achievement of all students, not just the "best students," as in the past. This means that school leaders need to have an in-depth knowledge of curriculum, instruction and student achievement. This publication provides guidelines for school leaders to understand and prepare for their changing role.

Outstanding Practices: Opening Doors to the Future: Preparing Low-achieving Middle Grades Students to Succeed in High School

Many students find the journey from the middle grades to high school difficult. They lack the knowledge and skills necessary for doing high-school-level work, and they do not have the study skills needed to meet higher standards in ninth grade and beyond. Middle schools and high schools increasingly are creating "safety nets" - special programs to help students make the transition to grade nine. This publication contains 15 examples of transition programs that work in raising achievement and keeping students in school.