**Book Reviews**

**Thinking Out Loud on Paper**
Lil Brannon, Sally Griffin, Karen Haag, Tony Iannone, Cindy Urbanski, and Shana Woodward
Heinemann (2008)*
Review/Commentary by Jennifer P. Gray

**Thinking Out Loud on Paper** discusses the use of the ‘daybook’ in writing classrooms. These six writers/teachers/researchers collaborated to share their experiences and their rationale for using the daybook in their writing classes. The authors describe the daybook as ‘a tool that we use in our daily lives with our students, as teachers/researchers, as writers’ (p. 1). The daybook is a ‘hardcover notebook with stitched-in pages’ that are difficult to remove, which allows students ‘to gradually let go of the perfectionism they have learned to expect of themselves’ (p. 12). Teacher/Researcher Ralph Fletcher describes daybook contents as ‘stuff’ that ‘defies description’ that students can repeatedly revisit as ‘readers, writers, and thinkers’ (p. 12). The authors indicate that the daybook is more than a diary or journal focusing on ‘just the students’ personal and often private thoughts’ (p. 12). Instead, the daybook is designed to be a place for ‘freely sharing writing, ideas and language’ that can provide writers with a place ‘to think and develop’ (pp. 19, 23). The six writers collectively stress the need to ‘nurture natural curiosity and questioning to create a nation of thinkers and give people the power to make and question meaning’ (p. 127). The daybook is one of the tools these writers use as they strive for this goal.

The authors provide readers with practical suggestions concerning the use of the daybook in the classroom setting as well as the theoretical explanations behind these practical techniques. Readers will find examples of ready-to-use successful classroom activities with student sample responses, and the theoretical reasons behind why these activities help writers. Teachers can pluck activities from the pages of this text and have a clear understanding of the theory behind the practice. The six writers have different backgrounds, varying from university professor to elementary school teacher, and they each share how the daybook can be used in a variety of situations, from fourth-grade classes to a senior-seminar class to teacher professional development meetings. One commonality the authors share is participation in the University of North Carolina at Charlotte’s National Writing Project.

The text begins by discussing what a daybook is, how to use it, how to introduce it to students, and why writers benefit from their encounters with daybooks. There are chapters that discuss digital daybooks and how to assess daybooks. The assessment process, also called a ‘daybook defense,’ shows readers how to provide meaningful feedback and evaluation that gives ‘students ownership over the assessment of this important work through reflection’ (pp. 85, 89). In this case, assessment is more than just surveillance or checking for completion; students and teachers are co-participators in the assessment process that encourages critical and self-reflective thinking. Five of the writers provide commentary about their experiences with daybook assessment, and they even include sample assessments completed by their students. Readers will find daybook assessment plans for classes including college writing courses, high school English, and elementary school interdisciplinary subjects.

A special chapter highlights the importance and empowerment of teacher research and how the daybook can become a ‘place for teachers to record experience and change practice’ (p. 111). Teachers are
advised to keep a daybook alongside their students for the maximum benefit. The writers believe that sharing their work, including failure and success, ‘demystifies the writing process and draws students and teachers into a community of writers’ (p. 19). The text concludes with the six writers’ voices and comments from their students as they reflect on the transformative power of the daybook in their lives as writers, thinkers, and researchers.

In an era of standardized writing tests that focuses on a timed one-shot production method of composition, there is a need for students to slow down to experience their writing process, to live with their ideas, to collect them and reflect on them prior to producing a paper. Most importantly, the daybook makes thinking visible. The space allows writers to gather their thoughts and then have a place to make sense of them. Writers can use the daybook as a catch-all space, a spare closet of collected ideas that otherwise have no other place to go. The daybook ‘captures students’ thinking’ and reflection, making them visible for writers and for their readers (p. 13). Encouraging writing as a means of thinking provides a welcome change to the one-shot production of formulaic writing assignments: ‘A daybook works well in classrooms that are concerned with what and how children learn and where teachers are curious about what and how children think’ (p. 13). The authors believe that the daybook is the ‘single most powerful tool’ they can put into the hands of their students (p. 16). After reviewing this text, it is also clear that daybooks can be the single most powerful tool for teachers to see our ‘thinking out loud on paper’ (p. 13).

(*Editors’ Note: The above is something of a departure for us. It’s usually the case that we run reviews that have been written by UoB staff, although this has never been a rule of any kind and external submissions are always welcome. Jennifer Gray, from the College of Coastal Georgia (Brunswick, GA, U.S.A.) sent us this review/commentary in the form of a short article entitled ‘Celebrating the Power of Curiosity and Creativity by Thinking Out Loud on Paper’. We were unable to use it in its original presentation, but we liked the piece enough to run it as a review, even though we usually review books no older than the previous year of publication. As always, the book reviews appear in the order that they were received.)