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## Professional Books of Interest

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# Professional Books of Interest

by Kathy Highfield and Laura Pardo

Dear Readers,

Fall is upon us again and with fall comes the yearly challenges to educators' lives: new colleagues, new students, new policies, new curriculum, new evaluation systems, and continued implementation of new standards. Moving forward with implementation of new state standards in ELA and mathematics brings another layer of learning. We meet this new territory in our practices as we question, adjust, shift, and implement new ways of teaching, learning, and assessing.



**Dr. Kathy Highfield**



**Dr. Laura Pardo**

I, Kathy Highfield, am proud to be a contributing columnist reviewing professional books for our readers. I have been writing professional reviews for *The Michigan Reading Journal* since 2012. Presently, I am the Coordinator of Curriculum and Staff Development in Holly Area Schools. Previously, I taught grades 2-8 and supported teachers working to improve instructional practices in the classroom. I am also an adjunct professor at the University of Michigan-Flint, occasionally teaching Master's courses in Literacy. I received my Ph. D. from Oakland University in 2003 and have worked since then to improve instruction and student achievement. This fall edition brings a new face to the Professional Books of Interest column. I am very happy to introduce my friend and colleague, Laura Pardo.

I, Laura Pardo, currently serve as the Evert J. and Hattie E. Blekkink Professor of Education at Hope College. As the chair of the Education Department at Hope, I collaborate with an incredible set of colleagues to teach, learn from, and graduate approximately 100 new teachers each year. My research interests include mentoring and induction, literacy across the disciplines, and teaching identity. I have two adult, married children, and three beautiful grandchildren who inspire me on a daily basis.

In this edition, we are excited to review four relevant books new to the eyes of our readers, covering the topics of elementary disciplinary literacy, project-based instruction, vocabulary learning, and effective teacher evaluation. We recommend these books for book studies and professional learning groups; they would also be excellent choices for your own professional libraries.

We welcome suggestions for future reviews via email. (Note: We only consider titles published *within the past 2 years*.) We plan to review at least four professional books or digital resources for each future issue of MRJ.

Happy reading,

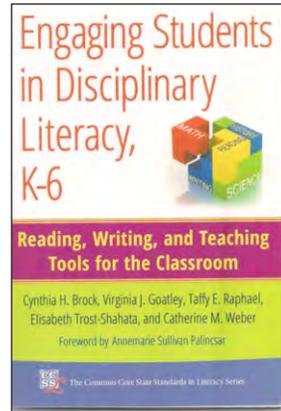
Kathy and Laura

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**Brock, C., Goatley, V., Raphael, T., Trost-Shahata, E., Weber, C. (2014).** *Engaging students in disciplinary literacy, K-6: Reading, writing, and teaching tools for the classroom.* New York: NY: Teachers College Press. ISBN 978-0-8077-5527-3 \$27.95

With the emergence and intense focus on the Common Core State Standards, teachers across the country are diligently striving to enact instruction that creates the kinds of higher-level thinking, problem solving, and collaborative work that the standards demand. As teachers and researchers began contemplating the types of instruction that would best support student growth, they were also forced to address the lack of attention to science and social studies content standards within the CCSS.



Brock, Goatley, Raphael, Trost-Shahata, and Weber produced a timely and helpful text that addresses the concept of disciplinary literacy in K-6 classrooms and providing concrete examples of project-based and integrated units of study that enable students to engage in real-world thinking. With the premise of supporting teachers' development of curricular units that feature reading, writing, and talking, the authors identified five key principles to guide the work.

1. Authentic cultural and social practices are critical features of instructional units.
2. An optimal learning model provides teachers with a framework for instructional units.
3. Key inquiry questions give structure to disciplinary study.
4. Composing meaning within and across units requires a range of resources (including both conventional texts and digital media).
5. Authentic assessments must reflect the different types of meaning-making processes students use as they read, write, and talk in the course of instruction. (pp. 11-13)

The authors acknowledge that elementary students do not regularly encounter informational text, and that when they do, they are often unsuccessful in making meaning. Therefore, they assert that instructional units will only be successful if teachers are able to integrate instruction of content and literacy, including reading, writing, and talking. Additionally, they promote the idea that children need to encounter a variety of text types including: fiction and nonfiction, primary sources, and a myriad of digital media.

The majority of the book focuses on embodying the principles of disciplinary literacy within curricular units of study in the classrooms of three different teachers. Mary is a second grade teacher whose classroom reflects the wide range of linguistic, racial, and cultural diversity evident in the Title I school where she teaches. Elisabeth's fourth grade classroom contains 29 English Language Learners, 27 of them receive free and reduced lunch, and represents six different countries of origin. Cassandra teaches sixth grade in a Title I school where many students are bilingual, and two-thirds of her students read at or above grade level.

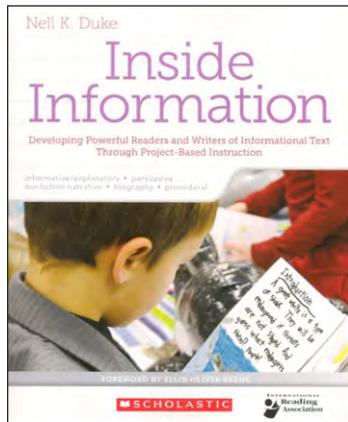
The authors illuminate units in science, social studies, and mathematics within these classrooms. Occasionally drawing on additional classroom examples, they move readers through a process of how to build curriculum that meets the Common Core State Standards, addresses higher-level thinking skills, and focuses on building disciplinary content knowledge. They do this by focusing on the five principles outlined above and situated within reading, writing, and talking. The book concludes with specific and detailed suggestions for following the principles to create and develop your own disciplinary literacy units.

**Duke, N.** (2014). *Inside information: Developing powerful readers and writers of informational text through project-based instruction*. New York: NY: Scholastic. ISBN 978-0-545-66768-5 \$35.99

The CCSS call for an increased use of informational text at the elementary level. With this comes the challenge of designing instruction that supports informational reading and writing.

Nell Duke's book is an excellent resource for teachers who are moving toward project-based instruction. Duke defines a project-based approach as instruction in which "students work over an extended time period for a purpose beyond satisfying a school requirement - to build something, to create something, to respond to a question they have, to solve a real problem, or to address a real need" (p. 11). Project-based learning is typically interdisciplinary, integrating content area learning with reading and writing, and infused with technology to achieve a real-world goal (e.g., problem, need, or opportunity).

In chapters 1 and 2, Duke outlines the basics so that enthusiastic classroom teachers can begin immediately with a classroom project. First, she explains the structure of a project-based unit and then describes the phases of implementation and instruction. She recommends connecting the project to families' interests and funds of knowledge to enhance motivation and give students a learning context with a true sense of purpose. Next, Duke offers tips for successful implementation and management of project-based work as well as pitfalls that teachers can avoid so that the projects are authentic, meaningful, motivating, and engaging.



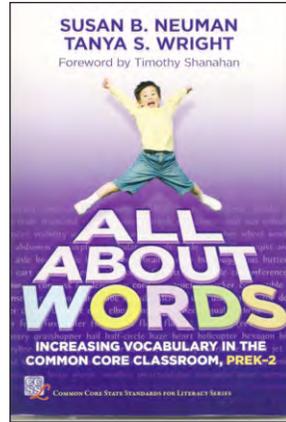
Duke also delves into the types of texts used in the classroom for project-based learning. She recommends and explains launch texts (read-aloud text at the start of the unit for inspiration), source texts (information for the project), and mentor texts (models or mentor texts) for students' own final product. Duke focuses on the quality of instruction as she offers specific information about text structures and features to support the reading and research phase of project-based learning. Duke reviews the gradual release of responsibility model and instructional techniques for elementary classrooms so that readers can work through each phase of project-based learning in order to deepen knowledge about designing and implementing units. She offers examples at each phase of the process.

Sprinkled throughout the book Duke offers valuable tools and resources for all classroom teachers, including a table explaining identification and use of text structures, a table with definitions of graphical devices, instructional techniques for K-5 reading informational texts broken down by grade level, examples of generic writing strategies, non-structural text features, feedback forms, and editing checklists. The book concludes with insightful advice about making project-based instruction more manageable in today's classrooms. Finally, as stated in her own words, "Remember the faith in children that brought you to this profession in the first place, and seize the opportunity to support them as they rise to the occasion" (p. 118).

**Neuman, S., Wright, T.** (2013). *All about words: Increasing vocabulary in the Common Core classroom, PreK-2*. New York: NY: Teachers College Press. ISBN 978-0-8077-5444-3 \$24.95

Neuman and Wright offer a practical guide to support vocabulary development for our youngest learners. The authors focus on vocabulary because, "recognizing that vocabulary - the

ability to understand, use, and organize words and concepts - could represent a major stumbling block for many of our young learners, it becomes even more imperative to provide children with these critical skills early on. This will require powerful instruction that not only improves children's vocabulary, but actually accelerates it, giving them the tools that they will need for meeting these rigorous Common Core Standards. And here's the good news: We know how to do it." (p. xi).



The authors provide a practical guide for teaching vocabulary to young children based on years of research, working with thousands of young learners. They focus their book first on why words are important, stating that “high-quality, developmentally appropriate instruction in oral vocabulary instruction can make an enormous difference in children’s lives” (p. 5). They explore and debunk common myths about vocabulary development, explaining that not only can we improve children’s vocabulary, but we can accelerate it with planned, purposeful instruction. They offer key principles for teaching oral vocabulary development along with a strong research base to support each principle.

Neuman and Wright examine the important role of a vocabulary-rich environment to support interactions and conversations around experiences, vocabulary, libraries, and technology. They explain the use of text sets, collections of resources from different genres to support vocabulary teaching. An in-depth explanation of how to select books to maximize vocabulary learning accompanies classroom vignettes that help clarify how these research principles look in the lives of everyday classrooms. This includes an explo-

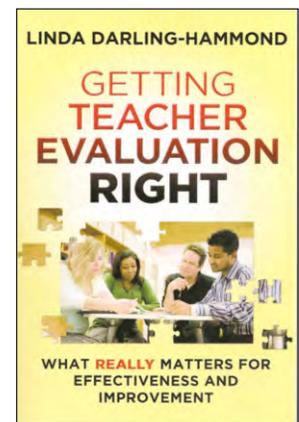
ration of grouping practices for instruction to support vocabulary development.

Finally, the scholars offer ways to assess and determine that children are learning new words. They suggest practical, classroom tested ways to measure student vocabulary learning through a variety of approaches, including game-like formats and more formal ways to accurately assess student learning. The book provides applicable ‘Think About It’ sections that provide time for the reader to reflect and apply the concepts in the book to his/her own classroom practices. There are resources (10 great websites with video clips and information for kids), tools (checklist to examine the classroom physical environment, for example), and an Appendix that offers additional support.

Neuman and Wright conclude their book with these words of wisdom: “Don’t be afraid to challenge young children” (p. 135). In their experience, teachers who expect much are often pleasantly surprised when young children rise to the challenge.

**Darling-Hammond, L.** (2013). *Getting teacher evaluation right: What really matters for effectiveness and improvement*. New York: NY: Teachers College Press. ISBN 978-0-8077-5446-7 \$25.95

Given the recent focus across the nation, and within our state, on teacher evaluation systems, this book is timely as well as insightful and easy to navigate. Since the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness (MCEE) was commissioned in 2011 and returned its report to



the MDE in July of 2013, many schools in Michigan have struggled with determining which evaluation tool to select for their schools and teachers. While classroom observation protocols have historical understanding, the notion of value-added measures being used to evaluate teachers is new. Darling-Hammond's book has two foci – equally important, as they are interwoven ideas.

First, Darling-Hammond explains the connection between teachers' continued development of skills and practices and student achievement gains. Second, she suggests ways to design assessment systems that document student growth and achievement in terms of understandings, reflections, and new learning for teachers. In order to improve both teaching skill and student growth, Darling-Hammond asserts that teachers must be integral players in the process of designing, collecting, analyzing, and teaching within their own classrooms and across their schools.

The book is organized around five components of such a system—components that Darling-Hammond asserts are imperative to the successful creation of a research-based teacher evaluation system. The five elements include:

1. Common statewide standards for teaching that are related to meaningful student learning and are shared across the profession;
2. Performance-based assessments, based on these standards, guiding state functions, such as teacher preparation, licensure, and advanced certification;
3. Local evaluation systems-aligned to the same standards, for evaluating on-the-job teaching based on multiple measures of teaching practice and student learning;

4. Aligned professional learning opportunities that support the improvement of teachers and teaching quality; and
5. Support structures to ensure properly trained evaluators, mentoring for teachers who need additional assistance, and fair and timely decisions about personnel actions (pp. vii-viii).

The crux of the book for me was Chapter 4, where Darling-Hammond describes how to build standards-based systems of local evaluation. When teachers work together to design and implement instruction and assessments, when they have collaborative planning time, when they observe each other and talk about student learning, and when this work occurs within content standards for student learning as well as standards for teaching (e.g. InTASC), teachers become better teachers, and students have greater achievement gains. These gains can only be realized, according to Darling-Hammond, when an entire school builds a professional learning community where school-wide goals are regularly acknowledged and evaluated, collaborative work is the expectation, and teachers engage willingly in reflection, revision, and improvement.

To demonstrate to the reader how this might happen, Darling-Hammond shares stories of various schools that have found success in understanding and improving teacher evaluation through systems of evaluation designed locally and revised as necessary. These examples help readers to realize both the simplicity and the complexity of teacher evaluation in an era of accountability, reform, standards, and determining the value added by an individual teacher.