

January 2016

Professional Books of Interest

Kathy Highfield

Laura Pardo

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Recommended Citation

Highfield, Kathy and Pardo, Laura (2016) "Professional Books of Interest," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 48: Iss. 2, Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol48/iss2/10>

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Professional Books of Interest

by Kathy Highfield
and Laura Pardo

Dear Readers,

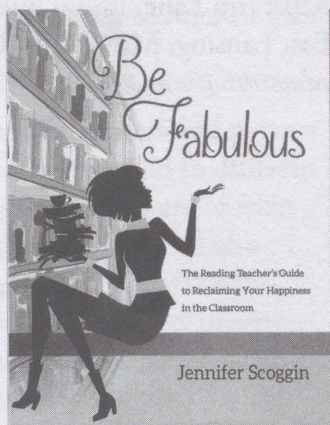
As we write this, we are in awe of the teaching professionals that surround us each and every day. You are amazing. Your dedication to children and love of learning are inspiring. They bring to mind the following quote by G.B. Stern: "Silent gratitude isn't much use to anyone." So, we would publicly like to express our gratitude for the difficult work you do each and every single day. And we would like to encourage you. Teaching is an amazing adventure. In this issue, we review three titles, all of which we highly recommend that you add to your professional reading list. These books are each worthy of your limited professional reading time and will help you improve your teaching practices and your lives. We offer a glimpse at the fabulous life of a teacher and the challenge to create and sustain a work/life balance with Scoggin's book. We encourage you to continue to incorporate research-based practices that support student learning, while maintaining a great sense of humor with Layne's book. And we remind you that your approach to literacy instruction matters with Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen's book. Enjoy!

Happy reading,
Kathy and Laura
kathy.highfield@has-k12.org
pardo@hope.edu

Scoggin, J. (2014).

Be Fabulous: The Reading Teacher's Guide to Reclaiming Your Happiness in the Classroom.

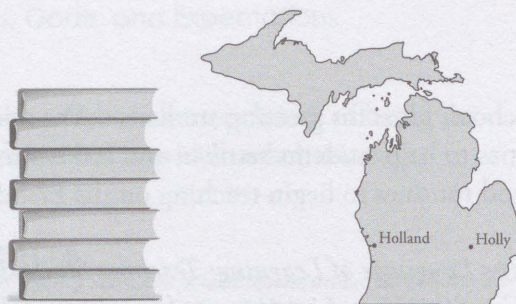
International Reading Association, Newark, DE. ISBN 978-0-87207-367-g \$19.99



Teachers are busy people. There are always more papers to grade, more lessons to plan, more professional

development to complete. In her book *Be Fabulous*, Jennifer Scoggin explores the challenges and celebrations that comprise teachers' struggles to find work/life balance. The book's premise is that teachers need to rediscover and reclaim personal happiness within their own classrooms. In doing so, teachers will embrace their literacy instruction and students will engage in meaningful reading and writing in a supportive environment, ultimately experiencing more success.

Scoggin has taught first and second grades in Harlem, NY. Like most K-12 teachers, she regularly shared stories of her students, her classroom,



Kathy Highfield



Laura Pardo

and her work with her colleagues, family members, and fellow graduate students. Desiring a space to share these stories with a wider audience, she began a blog under the guise of Mrs. Mimi. The blog took off as teachers commented and shared their own stories. Scoggin realized that many teachers wanted to find happiness and fulfillment in their work and their lives. This realization impacted her doctoral research, which focused on the development of teaching identity, and eventually the writing of this book.

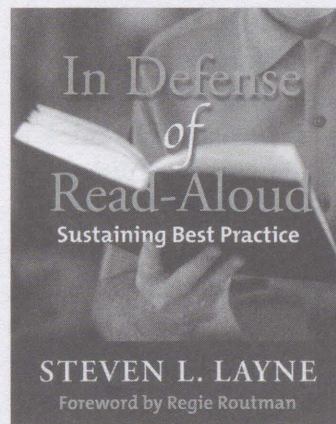
This text invites teachers to focus on their own personal, professional, and intellectual identities as both validation and motivation for lives lived in classrooms. Scoggin's text begins with a look at the climate and rigor that comprise classroom teaching: standardized testing, mandated curriculum, teacher-scripted materials, and the movement towards operating schools like businesses. Yes, teaching today is hard, but it's also rewarding. When teachers are happy, they are empowered and the students they teach have multiple opportunities for academic success. Scoggin implores each teacher to find inner happiness and admit that they are fabulous.

She asks teachers of reading to engage in a self-reflective process to find their inner fabulousness, offering the following suggestions to help you find out what makes you happy.

- Embrace your teaching philosophy
- Create classroom environments that promote reading independence for students
- Design and implement authentic and meaningful assessments
- Collaborate with colleagues
- Improve your stamina for the literacy block
- Take back control of your teaching
- Identify strategies for surviving mandated reading assessments
- Nurture your personal and professional reading life

The suggestion on this list that intrigued me was Scoggin's discussion of how to take back control of your teaching. The story she recounts is a familiar one—we plan something amazing with our students—and it works—and while we might share our excitement with a colleague or trusted friend—we choose not to share our fabulousness with a wider audience. Fear of being seen as a rebel, or a show-off, or for being out of compliance handcuff us to be amazing in solitude. Scoggin suggests that we share these successes with others as a way to take back our teaching, to feel empowered, to inspire others, and to affirm the fabulousness in each of us.

The book is well-written, sprinkled with classroom stories, research on best literacy practices, and delightful anecdotes. Scoggin's style and voice pulled me into her story immediately, and I read the book in two settings. Even though my classroom is full of twenty-somethings who are studying to be teachers, Scoggin has inspired me to reclaim my happiness and embrace my inner fabulousness. I would be surprised if this book did not do the same for you.



Layne, S. L. (2015).
In Defense of Read-Aloud: Sustaining Best Practice. Stenhouse Publishers, Portland, ME. ISBN 978-162531-040-8
 \$21.00

There is something very special that takes place in classrooms where teachers spend time daily reading aloud to students. In his new book, *In Defense of Read-Aloud: Sustaining Best Practice*, Steven Layne clearly articulates research-based reasons why reading aloud to students benefits their literacy development. Research overwhelmingly supports

the positive impact of reading aloud to students. Reading aloud increases comprehension, enhances early reading skills and speaking skills, improves vocabulary acquisition, improves parental involvement and student motivation. From a student's perspective, listening to teacher read-alouds benefits their syntactic development, vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and fluency, as well as reading skills such as pronunciation and inflection. Read-alouds improve students' writing, engagement, attitudes, and understanding of text types. They broaden students' thinking and imagination, and improve cultural sensitivity. They build rapport between teacher and students, and they deepen emotional intelligence.

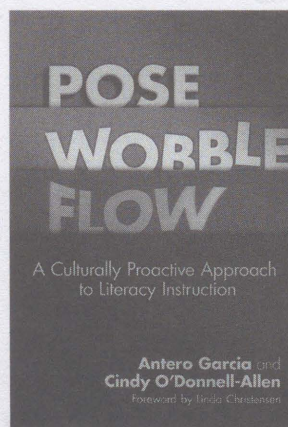
Layne calls us to be prepared to intelligently respond to the question, why are you reading aloud? In the context of high-stakes testing and accountability, every single moment of classroom life comes into focus. Teachers are often unprepared to defend the practice of reading aloud when it is implied that read-aloud is not a good use of instructional time.

"If someone asks you why you're reading aloud to the third graders and your first response is 'Because it's so much fun, and we all enjoy it,' we're in trouble. Big trouble. We're not in trouble because you're wrong. No, it's fine to include that as the seventeenth bullet point of your calculated and confidence-inspiring response. We're in trouble because that's too fluffy an answer to be your first go-to when someone is questioning your pedagogy. You sound like a Smurf. Stop it. You're an educator—you need to sound like one (Layne, 2015, p. 11)."

Steven Layne provides practical and important tips to help you establish read-aloud time in your classroom. He gives practical advice about selecting appropriate read-aloud texts and suggests ways to structure read-aloud time that protect the integrity of the activity and build a positive, respectful classroom climate. Layne also offers suggestions for

launching a new read-aloud book and integrating read-alouds into the daily routine of the classroom. He sprinkles the book with expert testimonials, expert position statements, letters between teachers and authors, and practical application of solid research. This wide variety of voices blends together seamlessly to support the love of reading aloud.

Layne's voice is strong and clear in this book—you can feel his passion for this topic. His sense of humor is refreshing and it rings true—so much that I found myself laughing and refreshed, as if I were reading a great beach book. Moreover, the book is so comfortably written it feels more like you are having a conversation in a cozy coffee shop, sitting in a big overstuffed chair next to the fireplace. All the while, Layne provides a great reminder of the value and importance of reading aloud daily to students of all ages: "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children (Anderson et al., 1985)."



Garcia, A. & O'Donnell-Allen, C. (2015). *Pose, Wobble, Flow: A Culturally Proactive Approach to Literacy Instruction.* Teachers College Press, Columbia University, NY. ISBN 080-775652-0 \$29.95

Perusing the catalog of new books from Teachers College Press, I was drawn by the provocative title and I simply had to read the book. As it turns out, the text is not just a book with an interesting title; the authors provide a critical lens into the teaching of secondary English Language Arts in an era of mandates, reforms, and high-stakes assessments for teachers who are striving to deliver instruction with integrity.

How many of us want to be culturally proactive teachers, as the subtitle suggests? Once we sort out the meaning of this phrase, most of us would resound with a loud "I DO!" We want to meet the needs of all students, we want to teach for social change, we want to teach well, and we want to improve our teaching.

Conscientious teachers struggle with balancing what they know about teaching writing and what they know their students will encounter in standardized tests. In their new text, Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen provide an innovative pedagogy called Pose, Wobble, Flow (P/W/F). The terms, and the metaphor, come from yoga where participants of yoga strike various poses, pushing themselves to the edge of what they can hold—which causes them to wobble. If one persists through the wobble, one gets a sense of being "in the flow."

The metaphor extends to teachers who strike various poses (positions, stances, etc.) to deliver instruction. They reflect on aspects of their practice that tend to feel wobbly and make adjustments until a particular practice feels "in the flow." This process is the heart of the book, and the authors discuss how teachers use this process to become culturally proactive instructors.

The text is organized around the following six poses.

- Culturally proactive teaching
- Teacher as hacker
- Literacy as civic action
- Teacher as writer
- Teacher as curator
- Teacher as designer

To develop an identity as a culturally proactive teacher, the authors recommend that we teach critical literacy skills, that we use the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of our students as resources for learning, and that we articulate our own positioning on the existing inequities within our school

and society in general. Teacher as hacker involves creating and sustaining a dialogic curriculum that meets the learning needs of our students within a classroom environment that enables vulnerable teaching and learning.

Literacy for civic engagement might be accomplished by working through the various contexts of power and identity in the texts and writing activities that students encounter in classrooms. It helps them to focus on power, social capital, and identity within their own unique contexts. A teacher as writer is a teacher who writes and who teaches writing, recognizing that assuming a writer identity is essential to educational equity.

When teachers assume a curator pose, they increase powerful, culturally proactive reading choices within the classroom by disrupting traditional and often culturally inaccessible curriculum (pushing back against the canon). Finally, the teacher as designer creates more equitable learning environments by codesigning the physical and cultural spaces to reflect the needs, lives, and interests of students.

Teaching is hard, especially for those of us who want to encourage students to think critically, to hold our own values about teaching and learning up front, to honor our students, to help them understand social and political forces, and to empower them to use their voices to advocate for themselves. There's no one way to build teaching practice; it's a personal and complex process that requires a certain amount of vulnerability, honesty, and uncomfortableness. To do this well, one needs to focus on students, the context, and the community; and that will require various poses, regular wobbling, and a continuous search for flow.

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