Review of *Pose, Wobble, Flow: A Culturally Proactive Approach to Literacy Instruction*

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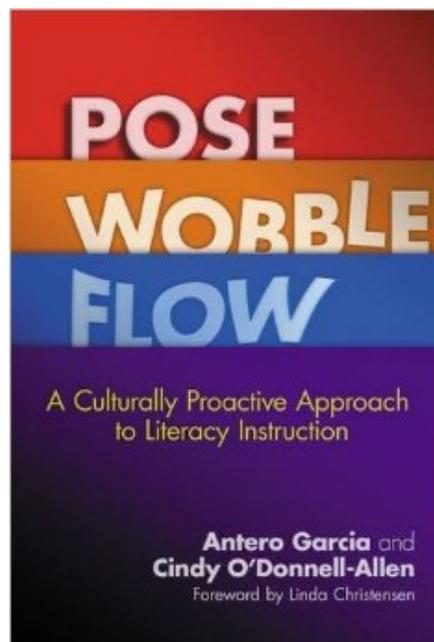
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Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen begin *Pose, Wobble, Flow: A Culturally Proactive Approach to Literacy Instruction* by outlining the purposes of the book, as well as by defining what they mean by the terms *pose*, *wobble*, and *flow*. Their work together grew out of common issues they were experiencing in their respective teacher education programs: namely, preservice teachers' resistance to the theoretical and political aspects of teaching. To explain the concepts of pose, wobble, and flow and the ways that these "stances" work together and inform one another, Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen (2015) draw from yoga, explaining that "teachers who are committed to professional growth also take up stances (or poses) toward their practice, and reflect on areas in which they wobble with the intent of attaining flow" (p. 3). Overall, the authors emphasize that the process of pose, wobble, and flow is both non-linear and collaborative.

To *pose* is to deliberately pause with the intent of examining teaching processes to consider the purposes behind them. Drawing from the work of Bob Fecho (2011), Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen define *wobble* as happening in those moments when something unexpected occurs, causing feelings of instability, uncertainty, and unpredictability, while avoiding undue discomfort. While perhaps disconcerting, wobble often leads to growth and development for both teachers and learners. Finally, *flow* is experienced when one engages in activities that are challenging, but not overwhelming or seemingly impossible. In other words, when an individual achieves flow, they should feel a sense of joy and fulfillment as they work through a task. Ultimately, as individuals move back and forth among the different aspects of pose, wobble, and flow, their identities should become more complex and developed.

The authors recognize two strategies for working through the pose, wobble, flow framework, which they return to throughout the book. In the first

strategy, the individual works within the system, meeting required mandates but on their own terms. In the second strategy, individuals work the system by overtly challenging it. Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen recognize that both strategies encourage a sense of teacher agency, but that the latter strategy is a more risky stance requiring teachers (at any stage) to have a firm rationale for their choices. Ultimately, the text offer five poses—which they use to frame the remainder of the text—that teachers may take as they work to achieve flow: teacher as hacker, literacy for civic engagement, teacher as writer, teacher as curator, and teacher as designer.

Chapter 1: Leaning Toward Praxis

In Chapter 1, Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen extend culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) and culturally sustaining teaching (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) to offer culturally proactive teaching as a means to achieve praxis in teaching. Culturally proactive teachers are more than responsive to the various cultural backgrounds of students, as they also work to anticipate students' needs and to intentionally initiate discussions and work around these needs. The authors recognize that this work is hard and that it will inevitably and necessarily lead to wobble as teachers are positioned as members of learning communities. However, they also emphasize the importance of taking on culturally proactive teaching practices in an educational climate that is plagued with increased testing, standardization, and accountability measures and is also experiencing contextual shifts brought on by technology and social networking that offer opportunities for asynchronous out-of-school collaboration.

Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen go on to address the ways that preservice teachers can be prepared to take on the pose of culturally proactive teachers and then provide concrete examples of this pose in action. Based on their own previous teacher

education experiences, the scholars recognize the resistance that many preservice teachers exhibit toward teacher educators who want to discuss topics like white privilege. To challenge this resistance, the authors recommend that teacher educators (1) openly discuss their theoretical reasons for addressing such topics, (2) provide concrete evidence from classrooms to support these theoretical reasons, and (3) weave these discussions throughout their courses.

Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen conclude the chapter by providing examples of ways that teachers can take on the culturally proactive stance both within and without the classroom. Ultimately, both authors acknowledge that such teaching may feel and actually be subversive, but that it is equally as important to recognize that "there's no such thing as an apolitical position in teaching" (p. 30).

Chapter 2: Hacking the English Language Arts

Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen understand the pose of teacher as hacker to be twofold. First, this pose entails examining traditional or taken-for-granted teaching practices and disrupting them in order to improve them. This pose requires the teacher to become vulnerable as they take on an inquiry-stance to examine their teaching practices, become personally invested in learning from others, establish themselves as open to change, and ultimately take informed action to improve and alter their teaching. This vulnerability also necessitates discomfort in the classroom as teachers work to establish "safe to" environments where students are encouraged to challenge and interrogate commonly held beliefs, course content, and one another. These spaces are differentiated from "safe from" spaces where students are protected from potentially challenging or uncomfortable material and tasks.

Second, the hacker pose requires that students and teachers be repositioned as *makers* in the classroom through a "connected learning" approach to teaching that (1) focuses on equity and access, (2) includes both civic engagement and academic

learning goals, and (3) occurs at the intersection of academic needs, student interests, and local culture. After presenting an example from a classroom where students were positioned as makers, Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen discuss a process of "uncreative teaching" where teachers work collaboratively to remix and repurpose instructional materials. In addition to the materials of teaching, the authors also advocate for the hacking of standards and teaching mandates.

Chapter 3: Literacy as Civic Action

Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen frame their third chapter around the idea that "*Enacting literacy is a civic action*" (p. 58, italics in original) and begin by discussing the ways that writing instruction can be structured so students see themselves as civically active. The authors articulate a definition of civic engagement as "having the individual power to understand and take action in areas of personal and social concern that affect one's life and the lives of others in the community and in the broader world" (p. 59). They use this definition to challenge the common narrative around civic education, which positions it as solely the concern of history and social studies courses, rather than as also integral to the English/Language Arts curriculum.

Specifically, Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen outline a writing curriculum that is civically engaged. Such an approach to writing instruction necessitates that (1) students practice using rhetorical and persuasive devices in their writing, (2) students determine and write to an appropriate authentic audience, (3) students inquire into the point of view of their audience, and (4) students have a challenging, critical, and supportive space within which to practice the craft of writing. Like the culturally proactive approaches to teaching, these authors advocate for writing curricula that blur the boundaries between school life and public life (Dewey, 1938) and encourages students to critically look for and at the power dynamics that exist in society (Freire, 1994).

This text goes on to discuss the participatory culture of civic writing—recognizing the power of digital spaces and media, in particular, to encourage collaboration as the aforementioned boundaries continue to blur. While the authors do recognize that access to technology may be limited in some settings, they are clear that technology alone is not necessary to lead to the types of transformative learning that they are discussing here. Ultimately, Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen advocate for civic writing and dialogue that "elevate[s] discourse to be *actionable* and *understandable*" (p. 66, italics in original).

Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen close the chapter with guidance for creating a civically engaged writing curriculum and then offering examples from actual English/Language Arts classrooms. Paramount to such an approach to teaching is the recognition that teaching is a political act and that it is in fact "impossible for teachers to exercise political neutrality within the classroom" (p. 68), and that anger, discomfort, and frustration are indeed productive and inevitable in such spaces.

Chapter 4: Embracing Your Inner Writer

Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen begin Chapter 4 by recognizing the tendency of most teachers (and most of society in general) to prioritize reading over writing. Further, few teacher education programs provide extensive preparation for the teaching of writing, and thus many novice teachers end up teaching writing in the ways that they experienced as students. These approaches to teaching writing need to be hacked to provide students with more time to write, to encourage them to writer longer, and to provide them with the types of feedback that can encourage reflection and growth.

Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen hack common approaches to teaching writing by first focusing on the teacher. They advocate for the development of consistent writing routines and habits to encourage teachers to see themselves as writers. They go on to address the importance of teachers sharing their own writing identities with students: modeling writing, writing alongside students, and sharing with students that writing can be both a frustrating and joyful process. The authors go on to discuss the role of community in writing. Not only can writing be a tool for social change, participation in a community of writers, even virtually, can hold writers accountable and encourage more consistent critical reflection. Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen close the chapter by pulling together some of the previously presented teacher poses and suggesting that reframing writing instruction "as work students do in and on the world, [to] help them recognize their own agency as learners as well as their civic responsibility to enact social change" (p. 86).

Chapter 5: Rethinking Reading

Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen encourage teachers to position themselves as "curators" as they reimagine their own reading curricula. This chapter is particularly concerned with inspiring teachers to select texts with and for students that will cultivate a critical consciousness.

The authors begin with a review of the ways that text has been conceptualized over time. They posit that by working to make the term *literacy* plural, the New London Group began, what would become, an ongoing expansion of what counts as text and literacy to include multimodal and digital texts, as well as diverse languages. The authors go on to challenge teachers to examine the texts that populate their classroom bookshelves and lesson plans, considering what these texts communicate to students about the issues they find to be important and/or appropriate for school and what identities are valued and/or valuable in schools and society. It is also important to acknowledge the variety of ways that students can go about selecting the texts they will read. Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen advocate for a "both/and" approach whereby students will have the opportunity to select their own texts (with the support and guidance of the teacher) and will be instructed to read specific

texts selected by their teachers. Through both approaches to text selection, teachers are responsible for helping students develop the tools and strategies they will need to navigate a variety of texts and to recognize the ways that texts are ideologically bound to the contexts of their creation and consumption, as well as with students' identities as readers.

Just as Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen encouraged teachers to acknowledge the inherent frustration of writing, they also recognize reading as potentially anxiety-provoking. While some amount of anxiety can lead to the types of uncertainty and wobble that they believe to be productive for development, these authors caution against reading practices that cause undue levels of frustration for students. By reading themselves and reflecting on their own reading experiences, teachers can work to create reading curricula that encourages wobble, but not frustration for students. Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen encourage teachers to read three types of texts on their own: (1) texts that ignite a passion for reading, (2) texts that help them to stay abreast of current community, youth, and cultural trends, and (3) texts that introduce new and/or improved methods for teaching English and/or literacy.

Chapter 6: Classroom Spaces, Cultures, and Possibilities

The pose of teacher-as-designer pulls together many of the poses and concepts previously presented in the book. Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen work from the premise that all spaces for learning are and must be constructed. They begin by reviewing the foundational, and irrelevant, reasons for school design: attempts at controlling students and preparing them for work in industry. Like text selection, they encourage teachers to consider what the classroom environment—from the use of time, positioning of desks, use of technology, and even who makes these decisions—communicate to students about what and who is valued and valuable. With the proliferation of technology and access to technology, spaces for learning and for

collaboration have expanded.

However, Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen warn against teaching practices that attempt to use technology as a band-aid for teaching challenging or dry material, and encourage teachers to consider the "3Ts"—Text, Tools, and Talk—of classroom engagement when deciding how and when to use technology in their courses (Philip & Garcia, 2013). The authors go on to consider the emotional aspects of space—both from a teacher and from a student standpoint. They advocate for teachers leading the design of learning spaces, but making this work part of an iterative process alongside students. They characterize classrooms as "sponsors of literacy" that support students in their out-of-school literacy practices, encourage students to engage with texts outside of formal schooling spaces, and challenge borders between school and community. Ultimately, Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen draw from Moje (2004) to encourage teachers to recognize space as both the physical environment of the school and community and the relationships that individuals have with these environments and with one another in these spaces.

The Elusive Decisive Moment

To conclude their book, Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen return to their original purposes for undertaking this work: a recognition that schools, students, and teachers are at a crossroads in education. As educational policies and mandates continue to change and demands on teachers increase, it is essential that teachers recognize their work as political and develop the strategies they need to advocate for themselves and their students. Ultimately, Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen find that this work requires an abiding faith. Teachers must have faith that every group of students they meet has the potential to change the world and that perfect engagement can be achieved. Teacher staying power is dependent on the cultivation and maintenance of this faith and the recognition that to teach is to engage in an ongoing process of

wobble with the hope of one day reaching flow.

Response

As I first began reading *Pose, Wobble, Flow* I was immediately conflicted over the intended audience of the text. Authors Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen draw from their own experiences with preservice teachers to frame their overarching purpose in writing the book, but then go on to move fluidly between offering guidance to teacher educators and providing examples of a pose, wobble, flow framework as enacted in "real" English/Language Arts classrooms. As a teacher educator, myself, early in my reading I latched on to the recommendations made for teacher preparation and found myself skimming over the examples offered from secondary classrooms. However, as I continued to read, I began to see that what I initially perceived to be a flaw in the writing of this text, was actually its strength. Just as pose, wobble, and flow are pieces of a fluid, iterative, and on-going process, so is the relationship between teacher preparation and "actual" classrooms.

When we, as educators, fail to recognize the relationship between teacher education and schools as symbiotic, we encourage the types of border reinforcement that Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen, drawing from Dewey in particular, advocate against. When borders between schools and communities, between universities and schools, between teachers and students are left unexamined, or worse, are reinforced, and efforts are made to alleviate tension, the potential for dialogue and transformative learning are diminished. For me, this is the crux of Garcia and O'Donnell-Allens' writing. When teachers can actively pose their actions in the classroom, they may reposition themselves as learners and embrace the sense of wobble experienced on the way to flow. When they cultivate classrooms (at any level of schooling) where uncertainty and vulnerability are welcomed and supported, teachers and students alike can become active learners and agents for educational and social change.

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