ON MY BOOKSHELF

Tina Grotzer, Ed.M.’85, Ed.D.’93, Principal Research Scientist

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY READING? The Book Thief by Markus Zusak. It is the story of a young girl, Liesl, growing up in a foster family in Nazi Germany. She steals books, each of which are significant to her learning. It chronicles her growing awareness of the broader political context, including why her foster family is hiding a man of Jewish faith in their basement. It is hauntingly written and compelling in how it juxtaposes Liesl’s innocence, hope, and resilience to the horrific events of the time.

WHAT DREW YOU TO IT? My mother grew up during World War II in Nazi Germany. She was four years old when the war started and so was oblivious to the broader events around her. With nine children in her family and her father in hiding to avoid Nazi orders to join the army, her parents focused on trying to feed them. During my own childhood, I struggled to understand what the war meant for my mother growing up but also felt guilt that my grandparents didn’t do more. The book has helped me to consider what they understood from day to day and how it differed from what we know looking back.

FAVORITE BOOK TO ASSIGN TO YOUR STUDENTS? Fires in the Minds by Kathleen Cushman. It is an important reminder that while we focus so heavily on designing curriculum for kids, giving them agency and trust can yield incredible outcomes.

FICTION OR NONFICTION? This is hard to answer. I read a lot of nonfiction because it fuels my work. I find it hard to stay put because I have conversations in my head with the author and often end up wanting to write. I love reading Atul Gawande because the ideas are compelling, but the narratives are powerful and engaging like fiction.

FAVORITE PLACE TO CURL UP WITH A GOOD BOOK? The hammock, where I can hear the birds and insects all around me.

NEXT UP: Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration by Keith Sawyer. I am really interested in concepts related to “group flow” and the dynamics that enable it. So much of what we focus on and reward in the world relates to individual accomplishment; we have yet to develop structures that fully explore or recognize the power of collaboration and collaborative flow.

FOR A FULL LIST OF BOOKS FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE: GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED. IF YOU’RE PART OF THE ED SCHOOL COMMUNITY AND YOU’VE RECENTLY PUBLISHED A BOOK, LET US KNOW: BOOKNOTES@GSE.HARVARD.EDU

TEACHERS BRIDGING DIFFERENCE: EXPLORING IDENTITY WITH ART

Marit Dewhurst

In her new book, MARIT DEWHURST, Ed.M.’03, Ed.D.’09, a professor at City College of New York, looks at the ways that educators can use art to better understand how our different identities tied to race, class, culture, gender, religion, ability, sexual orientation, and nationality shape who students are and how they move in the world. She writes, “The ability to understand our students, their families, and their communities is imperative if we aim to facilitate empowering learning experiences.”
CHILDREN AT THE CENTER
Betty Bardige, Megina Baker, and Ben Mardell

Calling themselves tour guides, authors BETTY BARDIGE, ED.D.’83, and Project Zero researchers and investigators Megina Baker and Ben Mardell give readers an inside look at Boston Public Schools’ early education programs for preK and kindergarten students, including how the program was built in the city, early results, examples of success, and challenges and barriers faced. But the book isn’t all theory and policy — the authors eavesdrop in classrooms, at community events, and during staff meetings for the city office that oversees the programs. Children at the Center not only tells the story, but, as the authors write, “shows the program in action,” too.

USING GRAMMAR TO IMPROVE WRITING: RECIPES FOR ACTION
Sarah Tantillo

In her third book since graduating from the Ed School, SARAH TANTILLO, ED.M.’91, offers what may seem like just a grammar instructional manual but is, she says, “secretly a book about how to teach students how to write clearly.” And that matters because writing clearly seems to be a problem for many students, she says. Tantillo doesn’t waste time with the easy-to-follow book, starting with a critical chapter for instructors called “What should we STOP doing?” and including sections on helping students who are not at grade level, factors that affect how well we write, and what we should be teaching from kindergarten through high school.

BEFORE SHE SLEEPS
Bina Shah

Described by Kirkus Reviews as “a novel that is in explicit conversation with The Handmaid’s Tale,” Before She Sleeps by journalist and writer BINA SHAH, ED.M.’94, focuses on a world devastated by war, the Virus, and gender selection, where young women are sent to indoctrination camps, forced to become mothers, and required to take on multiple husbands. Men hold all the power. There are the resisters, of course, the women who live in a hidden collective called the Panah, women who refuse to be wives and instead go underground in order to be free.

TRANSFORMATIVE SCHOOLING
Vajra Watson

VAJRA WATSON, ED.M.’01, ED.D.’08, director of research and policy for equity at University of California Davis, writes about the ways that schools can become more racially inclusive. As a case study, the book follows efforts made over five years by the Oakland Unified School District to join forces with community organizers, teachers, parents, religious leaders, neighborhood elders, and students to launch the Office of African American Male Achievement and attempt to disrupt underachievement. “Altogether,” Watson writes, “a school district and a community joined forces to resurrect possibility.”