**Updrafts: Case Studies in Teacher Renewal**
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**Beyond the Writers’ Workshop: New Ways to Write Creative Nonfiction**
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**Updrafts: Case Studies in Teacher Renewal**


As its title suggests, *Updrafts: Case Studies in Teacher Renewal* promises an uplifting, refreshing account of teacher renewal. Roy Fox and his colleagues tell eight well-crafted and thoughtful stories of how experienced, successful teachers negotiated their professional and personal journeys to renewal. These case studies, firmly grounded in theory, will have schools rethinking professional development experiences. The book reaches beyond the audience of practicing teachers seeking their own renewal to appeal to administrators and teacher educators particularly concerned with problems such as the attrition of beginning teachers.

The book is the culmination of a year-long study conducted by Fox and seven other researchers, all of whom are public school and university teachers. Many of the researchers, as well as the participating teachers, are currently or were previously affiliated with the Missouri Writing Project. The case-study approach used by the researchers lends itself to an in-depth look at individual teachers working within a variety of contexts who discover renewal in what sometimes seem like unlikely places.

One of the book’s strengths is in the rendering of the participating teachers’ stories of rejuvenation. Authors Janet Alsup, Susan Baruffi, Marilyn Richardson, Marilyn Schultz, Patrick Shaw, Lucy Stanovick, Jill Weisner, and Fox construct the teachers’ stories in ways that illustrate the complexities and challenges associated with the teaching profession and also provide compelling glimpses into the reality of these teachers’ personal and professional lives and the tricky balance they seek to maintain between the two.

Fox casts these narratives in the framework of three concepts.

1) The teacher’s social contexts, which “affect what we do and how we feel about it” (xxv). These contexts have a major impact on how (or if) a teacher is enabled to renew personally and professionally.

2) The dual notions of passion and flow. All the teachers in the study are described as passionate about teaching and working with students, and all are described having flow experiences during teaching. Flow experiences, as defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his forward to the book, relate to those times when “we become deeply absorbed in challenging yet pleasurable activities” (xxxi). Fox asserts that the connection between passion and flow directly influences a teacher’s renewal experiences.

3) The development of the teacher’s voice, which Fox says “largely shapes a teacher’s identity” (xxxv). These three criteria together enable teachers to take control of their careers and make sense of their own teaching and learning.

*Updrafts* is divided into three parts, all of which connect to the wind metaphor advanced in the title. Part 1, “Tailwinds,” includes the stories of teachers whose renewal experiences come from being...
“blown forward” from teaching into a variety of activities related and unrelated to teaching. In the book’s opening chapter, Lucy Stanovick introduces readers to one of the themes that emerges from the book—how teachers’ professional and personal lives constantly overlap. In telling the story of Kate’s renewal, Stanovick explains how Kate found her voice and experienced renewal through the creative outlets of pottery and poetry.

The next two chapters introduce us to teachers who also found renewal in creative places, one in her writing and painting and the other through involvement with her school’s drama productions—activities that allowed these teachers to move forward to more fulfilling lives. Then, recounting a road toward renewal with which many writing project teachers will identify, Susan Baruffi shows how Alex’s involvement in the Missouri Writing Project led to her empowerment and renewal as a writing teacher, a development which in turn led to an unexpected job change.

Part 2, “Crosswinds,” introduces us to teachers whose experiences with renewal have come from unexpected directions. Janet Alsup tells the story of Kim, her former teacher and colleague. For Kim, the daily routine of reflecting on her students’ lives and work while doing the dishes provided a setting that allowed her to realize the unexpected direction she needed to take to rethink her practices in the classroom. Her renewal, which came through the investigation of her own cognitive processes, brought about Kim’s professional growth. Alsup comments, “As Kim grew as a thinker, she grew as a teacher” (82).

In another chapter in part 2, Marilyn Richardson charts Pat’s transforming renewal experiences from the time they met as graduate students to the present as colleagues teaching at the same university. In search of ways to bring her classes to life, Pat returned to graduate school where she discovered whole language theory and other ideas that resonated with her beliefs. Her immersion in these ideas provided Pat with the theoretical underpinnings she needed to introduce strategies in her physical education classes that emphasized cooperation rather than competition, a stance that reinforced her view of what education should be. Pat’s story exemplifies an important premise of the book—that renewal is learning, and it often comes from unexpected sources at unexpected times, like the blowing of a crosswind.

Part 3, “Whirlwinds,” describes teachers who are swept up and carried toward renewal by experiences beyond their control. Patrick Shaw introduces us to the whirlwind of Tish’s experience. Tish’s lesbian relationship has isolated her from her colleagues. Her personal life undergoes several traumas, but she emerges from this whirlwind strengthened as she begins to write about issues of gender and literacy. Later in part 3, Fox takes us with him as he travels across the country, family in tow, from Idaho to a new job in Missouri. His engaging, often humorous account of his whirlwind of a trip concludes with his understanding that even though he was personally connected to Idaho, his professional role there was more as an administrator than a teacher. He didn’t want that. His is a journey toward renewal.

Fox’s final chapter, “Toward a Model for Teacher Renewal,” offers practical, specific suggestions for how schools can support teachers as they seek to renew themselves personally and professionally. Briefly, they are as follows:

1. Demystify teacher renewal.
2. Reimburse teachers for the costs of professional development.
3. Provide teachers with career/psychological counseling.
4. Provide participatory and flexible options for teacher renewal.
5. Integrate teachers’ personal development with professional development.
6. Create environments that enable teachers to demonstrate their passion for content—for exploring it and communicating it.
7. Create environments that enable teachers to demonstrate how their passions connect to students’ larger cultures.

While emphasizing the study’s finding that renewal is often a personal and highly individual process, Fox suggests a shift in the paradigm of teaching to accommodate the needs of teachers. The implications of this book extend beyond meeting the needs of individual teachers seeking strategies for renewal. This study will no doubt also add to the current conversations regarding professional development, teacher education, and school reform.

*In accordance with the style of the book itself, teachers who served as subjects of case studies are referred to by first name only.

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