

## **MAAP Book Review: Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Dragon by Yong Zhao -Gretchen Harriman**

In his book, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Dragon?" Yong Zhao shares the inside story of China's educational system--the good and the bad. His historical and cultural explanations of the Chinese educational system are captivating and serve as a cautionary tale to educators who covet external test scores as a means to defining academic excellence.

Zhao's insider account of the Chinese educational system not only exposes the commitment and sacrifices necessary to achieve top-ranking Program for International Student Assessment(PISA) scores but serves as a primer to understanding the historical, cultural, and political background that fuels China's educational pursuits and reforms. It also affirms the strengths of the American educational system and recognizes the assets that are often overlooked in the race to the top of international assessments, specifically the PISA test.

Zhao is an advocate of "an education that enhances individual's strengths, follows children's passions, and fosters their social-emotional development.' He challenges the thinking of Americans who are enamored with the results that come from an authoritarian system, warning against compromising creativity and innovation. His commitment to innovation that "comes from the work of free-spirited people driven by passion, equipped with the necessary expertise and resources, and granted to the autonomy to explore" speaks to the core of alternative educators.

"Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Dragon" is a must-read for educators who intuitively question the global comparisons and the over-valuation of test scores. It exposes faulty logic and comparisons, and intelligently reminds us to stay true to the unique strengths of our educational system.