



A Union of Professionals

VOL. 43, NO. 1 | SPRING 2019
www.aft.org/ae

AMERICAN Educator

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IDEAS

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

**MAKING ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL CLASSROOMS
LGBTQ-INCLUSIVE**
PAGE 17

ART IN SCHOOL
PAGE 22

**THE COMMUNITY-LED
FIGHT FOR DYETT**
PAGE 30

**TECHNOLOGY
AS A TOOL FOR
STUDENT SUCCESS**
PAGE 36



CULTIVATING TEACHER LEADERS

A UNION-LED EFFORT CONNECTS CLASSROOM PRACTICE TO EDUCATION POLICY PAGE 4

Explore the All-New **AFT eLearning Platform**

AFT members can access free online courses that are:

- ⬆ Facilitated by experienced AFT trainers;
- ⬆ Self-paced—perfect for busy educators; and
- ⬆ Customizable to meet local needs.

Plus, AFT members receive a certificate of completion at the end of each course.

Visit **AFTeLearning.org** now.



FORGIVE STUDENT DEBT

If you work in public service, a little-known government program called Public Service Loan Forgiveness could allow you to have all of your direct federal student loans forgiven, tax-free. Find out if you are eligible by going to **www.forgivemystudentdebt.org**.



Forgive My Student Debt

A project of the Debt-Free Future campaign



Confronting the Scourge of Gun Violence

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

Most often, I use this column to offer my perspective on one of the issues addressed in *American Educator*. I have many thoughts about the topics covered in these pages, particularly the Teacher Leaders Program, which the AFT started during my presidency. But I write this shortly after the first anniversary of the tragic murder by a former student of 17 students and staff at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and shortly after visiting the school. I have developed many bonds in Parkland and elsewhere forged out of tragedy—with students, school staff, parents, and grandparents who have lost loved ones in school shootings. Their unbearable losses, and those of thousands of American families, compel me to do all in my power to confront the intolerable scourge of gun violence in America.

In the 12 months since the tragedy at Stoneman Douglas, nearly 1,200 children have been fatally shot in the United States. In the two decades since the rampage at Columbine High School in Colorado, more than 187,000 students have been exposed to gun violence at school. Let that sink in. America is utterly failing our youth.

Young people are fluent in the short-hand of school massacres—Columbine, Sandy Hook, and now Stoneman Douglas. A majority of American teens now say they are worried about a shooting happening at their school. There are indications that measures intended to make students safer, such as lockdowns and active shooter drills, can instead make them feel *less* safe and more anxious.

While school shootings still are relatively rare, more can and must be done to intervene and prevent them. This includes improving the physical security of schools by installing internal locks and limiting entry points in schools, but it does not mean turning schools into armed fortresses, or arming teachers—research shows that would only make schools more dangerous. Abbey Clements,

a second-grade teacher at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, who survived the 2012 shooting rampage that claimed the lives of 20 first-graders and six staff, is one of many educators who denounce this risky and ineffective tactic. “This is not the movies,” Clements says. “It’s school.”

Schools need resources to support students’ social, emotional, and behavioral well-being—including bullying prevention, positive behavioral interventions and support, and wraparound services. School staff should receive training to identify, assess, and respond to threatening behaviors that can lead to violence. As we saw in Los Angeles and other places where teachers have walked out of their schools to demand necessary resources for their students, America’s public schools need more counselors. Far too few students have access to a trained counselor at school. About 1 in 5 youths ages 13–18 experiences a severe mental disorder, but only half of children with a mental health condition receive mental health services.

Our schools can’t do this alone. The AFT, the National Education Association, and Everytown for Gun Safety recently called on lawmakers to implement strategies proven to help enhance school safety and reduce gun violence, including:

- **Background checks on all gun sales**, to keep guns out of the hands of people who shouldn’t have them;
- **Responsible firearm storage laws**, to make it harder to access the most common sources of guns used in school shootings: the shooter’s home, friends, and family; and
- **Raising the age to purchase semi-automatic firearms** to 21, to prevent minors from easily getting their hands on the most lethal weapons.

There has been slow but promising progress. The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed bills broadening

federal background checks for firearm purchases. And the state of New York passed a red flag law, which allows family members, educators, and law enforcement officials to seek to have guns confiscated from people deemed by courts to be an “extreme risk” to themselves or others.

These actions are effective and have public support. It’s time for children and common sense to take priority, not the National Rifle Association’s fearmongering that claims every gun safety proposal violates the Second Amendment. Frankly, policymakers who put campaign contributions from the NRA and gun manufacturers ahead of Americans’ safety are complicit in this crisis. Teachers will continue to speak out against these warped priorities. That’s why we joined a lawsuit to investigate why the Education Department is more focused on arming teachers than funding mental health services in schools. And that is why we are grateful that the new leadership in Congress is holding the first hearings in years on gun violence prevention.

Teachers want what children need, and there is no better demonstration of that than providing every child with a safe and welcoming school environment. We can and must do better.



Weingarten with Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School student Mei-Ling Ho-Shing at a rally for public education in Pittsburgh.

MICHAEL CAMPBELL



4 Cultivating Teacher Leaders

A Union-Led Effort Connects Classroom Practice to Education Policy

BY ROBIN VITUCCI AND MARJORIE BROWN

Because they connect with students every day, teachers have direct knowledge about what works—and what doesn't work—in the classroom. Yet too often, teacher voice is glaringly absent from discussions of education policy. So that educators can in fact contribute to these discussions, the AFT in 2011 established the Teacher Leaders Program, which has enabled more than 1,000 educators to take active leadership roles in their schools, school districts, and local communities.

12 The Professional Educator

Fostering Teacher Leadership in North Syracuse

BY JOHN KURYLA

A union leader reflects on how the AFT Teacher Leaders Program has enabled members to conduct education research and advocate for policies that support teaching and learning.



17 Reading and Teaching the Rainbow

Making Elementary School Classrooms LGBTQ-Inclusive

BY JILL M. HERMANN-WILMARTH AND CAITLIN L. RYAN

Researchers explain why LGBTQ-inclusive instruction in elementary school matters and suggest approaches and resources for teachers as they do this work.

22 Art in School

As Essential as Language

BY PHILIP YENAWINE

By using a specific approach to introducing works of art, teachers can foster students' skills of observation, social interaction, and language development.

28 Art and Healing in Puerto Rico

BY ELUCIANO VEGA GONZÁLEZ

A veteran teacher in San Juan discusses the importance of art in students' lives.

30 The Fight for Dyett

How a Community in Chicago Saved Its Public School

BY EVE L. EWING

A professor chronicles a community coalition's efforts to revitalize a "failing" school.

36 The Digital Dilemma

Making Technology a Tool for Student Success—Not a Distraction

BY ANA HOMAYOUN

An educational consultant highlights organization and time-management strategies for teachers and students.



OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

RANDI WEINGARTEN
President

LORRETTA JOHNSON
Secretary-Treasurer

MARY CATHRYN RICKER
Executive Vice President

AMY M. HIGHTOWER
Editor

JENNIFER DUBIN
Managing Editor

SEAN LISHANSKY
Copyeditor

JENNIFER CHANG
Art Director

JENNIFER BERNEY
Graphic Designer

RACHEL ANDERSON
Production Assistant

AMERICAN EDUCATOR (ISSN 0148-432X, USPS 008-462) is published quarterly by the American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2079. Phone: 202-879-4400. www.aft.org

Letters to the editor may be sent to the address above or to ae@aft.org.

AMERICAN EDUCATOR cannot assume responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

Please allow a minimum of four weeks for copyright permission requests.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the viewpoints or policies of the AFT.

AMERICAN EDUCATOR is mailed to AFT teachers and early childhood members as a benefit of membership. Subscriptions represent \$2.50 of annual dues. Non-AFT members may subscribe by mailing \$10 per year by check or money order to the address below.

MEMBERS: To change your address or subscription, notify your local union treasurer or visit www.aft.org/members.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to American Educator, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2079.

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices.

© 2019 AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, AFL-CIO



Cover photographs:
AFT STAFF

FIGHTING THE OPIOID CRISIS IN OUR COMMUNITIES

The AFT has developed a free online course to help members combat the opioid crisis. Created by faculty and staff at Harvard Medical School, the course aims to address the widely recognized training and information gaps members may encounter when working in communities affected by opioid addiction. Any AFT member—from librarians to teachers to school nurses—can use this course to learn how to recognize the signs of addiction, what to do when someone is overdosing, and more. Take the course at www.aftlearning.org/group/61.

VICTORY IN LOS ANGELES

After two years of negotiations and six days on the picket line, members of United Teachers Los Angeles have a new contract with the Los Angeles Unified School District that makes a clear commitment to the resources and conditions necessary for teachers to teach and kids to learn. Parents, students, clergy members, and the entire union community joined with Los Angeles educators to convince city leaders to reorder their priorities and put public schools first. Combined with the successful strike of teachers at Accelerated charter schools, the first charter educators to strike in California, the win represents nothing short of a sea change for educators in L.A. and for public education in the country. For more about this historic win, see <http://go.aft.org/ae119news1>.



TEACHERS SHINE A LIGHT ON INJUSTICE

Educators assembled in the border city of El Paso, Texas, in February for a “Teach-In for Freedom” organized by 2018 National Teacher of the Year Mandy Manning. The event drew attention across the country to the plight of the thousands of migrant children held in detention by the U.S. government. AFT President Randi Weingarten led the group in a somber reflection of the lifelong impacts that these oppressive tactics have on immigrant children and their families. The AFT also donated books in Spanish for the event, which featured lessons and talks by educators and activists.

VICTORY IN WEST VIRGINIA—AGAIN!

More than 30,000 educators in West Virginia walked out of their classrooms in February in response to a state funding bill that would have drained critical resources from public education. AFT President Randi Weingarten joined teachers and support staff on the picket line to protest the partisan bill that appeared to be driven by outside wealthy interests, such as Americans for Prosperity, that want to privatize and defund public schools. Educators called off the strike when the bill was killed in the state’s House of Delegates. “Let West Virginia serve as a lesson to those who feign devotion to our students but do the opposite,” said Weingarten. “We’ve dealt with these shenanigans for a while, but what has changed is that we are willing to engage in direct action as a last resort.” Read more at <http://go.aft.org/ae119news2>.

—THE AFT COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT



Sign up at www.aft.org/signup to receive the **AFT’s monthly e-news** for professional development resources, news, and digital actions to show that you, too, are **sticking with your union.**

Cultivating Teacher Leaders

A Union-Led Effort Connects Classroom Practice to Education Policy



BY ROBIN VITUCCI AND MARJORIE BROWN

We've all lived through the unintended consequences of even the most thoughtful policies. Adhering to a strict class and bell schedule makes sense, unless you teach at the end of the day and regularly lose many of your students to early dismissal and much of your teaching time to afternoon announcements. And "freshman clusters" sounds like a great idea, unless your district lacks the infrastructure and personnel to support them. But what if we gave stakeholders, namely educators, a chance to research a policy they found irksome (or worse), hone their practices around this policy, and end up fixing what's broken in the process?

Effective teacher leadership recognizes that teachers are essential to the success of a school and the district as a whole. Such leadership can take place in individual classrooms or among teachers, but leadership on a larger scale happens when teachers have opportunities to influence policy. The public as well as policymakers know that teachers are the ones who connect with students every day and have direct knowledge of what is working or not working in the classroom or school.

Teacher leadership is vital to student success, with research finding positive connections between student achievement

and teacher leadership and collaboration.* Countries with top-performing educational systems, like Finland and Singapore, promote teacher professionalism and connecting teachers with policymakers.¹ Decisions in the U.S. education system, on the other hand, are typically made by people who are far removed from the classroom. Teacher leadership, while certainly not a new idea, is increasingly important in our current climate to ensure students are taught in environments that are focused on their needs rather than on the ideas of far-removed politicians and policymakers, or those who have little experience in public education.[†]

Ultimately, teachers must play a part in changing the narrative and practice of top-down school reforms. As author and educator Frederick M. Hess has written, teachers must be "ready to step out of their classroom, able to deal with policymakers in good faith, and willing to make teacher leadership more than an empty phrase."^{2‡}

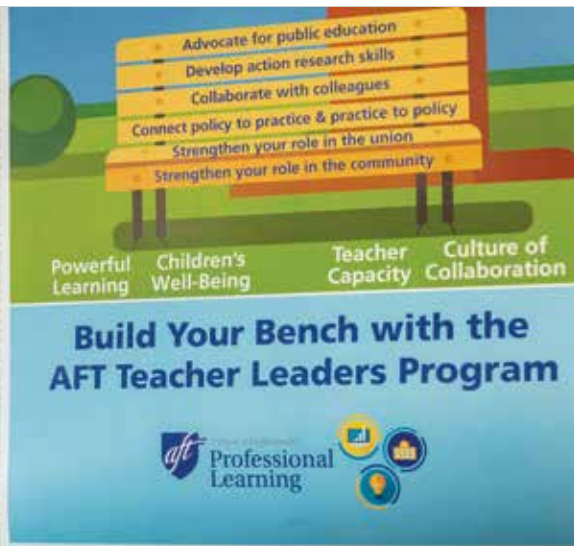
Teacher leaders who are members of the American Federation of Teachers are doing just that. Since 2011, the AFT Teacher Leaders Program (TLP) has helped prepare educators (typically teachers) to facilitate discussions of policy issues that

Robin Vitucci is a senior associate and Marjorie Brown is an assistant director in the American Federation of Teachers' educational issues department. This article is based on a research brief published by the AFT in 2017, "Teacher Leadership: From Practice to Policy," available at www.aft.org/sites/default/files/tlp3_practicetopoly.pdf.

*For more on these connections, see "Elevating Relationships" in the Summer 2017 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/summer2017/quintero.

†For more on the importance of uniting research and practice from a teacher's perspective, see "True Teaching Expertise" in the Summer 2016 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/summer2016/mascio.

‡For more on helping educators make meaningful change, see "Teachers Uncaged" in the Spring 2015 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2015/hess.



impact the profession both locally and nationally.[§] The program has brought together and coached cohorts of teachers to take active leadership roles in their individual schools, school districts, and local communities. As teacher leaders, these educators have served as catalysts to build the profession and strengthen not just the union but also its connection to the community, in order to generate support for and better understanding of public schools.

How the Teacher Leaders Program Works

To participate in the program, local presidents submit an application in late winter and are selected in early spring. Once a local is accepted into the program, educators who are interested in joining must submit an application to their local. The local president then selects a member of the local to become a program facilitator, and both the president and the facilitator must attend a two-day orientation run by the AFT. Each facilitator is trained to lead a cohort of approximately 12 educators, called “teacher leaders,” who meet over eight months during the school year, one Saturday each month for a full day. There, they discuss issues in their district and state; receive training around framing policy positions; and then conduct research in their classrooms and schools, participate in conversations with policy leaders, and share their findings and recommendations. These teachers then become leaders in their school, union, or

[§]Although participants are usually classroom teachers, others have included paraeducators, librarians, counselors, custodians, and other school employees who are dues-paying members of the AFT.

Leadership on a larger scale happens when teachers have opportunities to influence policy.

district, and sometimes have a broader impact in the form of lasting policy changes.

Once the local has selected its cohort of teacher leaders, the AFT provides resources to support them, including technical assistance and curriculum materials focusing on education policy. The primary curriculum guide for the program is *The Power of Teacher Networks* by Ellen Meyers, a book focused on how groups of teachers can come together to support each other and also find solutions to the problems they face. Additionally, the AFT offers stipends for participating teachers and facilitators, ongoing support (e.g., meeting planning, monthly conference calls, advice on personalizing the program to best fit a local’s needs, and locating helpful research), and access to a nationwide online community of teacher leaders from all locals currently engaged in this work. More than 1,000 educators and a total of 32 locals have participated since the program’s inception (see Figures 1 and 2 on page 6).



For more on the AFT Teacher Leaders Program, email Marjorie Brown in the AFT’s educational issues department at EDissues@aft.org.

Teacher voice is essential in supporting what works for schools and students.

Participating teachers have developed skills in several important leadership areas, including building a collaborative culture; accessing, using, and presenting relevant research that connects with policy and practice; becoming advocates for teachers, students, and their families, and for public education; and understanding policy issues and making recommendations through their unions. Adam Marcoux, the president of the Nashua Teachers' Union in New Hampshire, explains that this program has helped teachers to rethink their role and the role of the union. Instead of asking, "What is my union doing for me?," members now ask each other, "How are you getting involved in the union?"

The impetus for the program was the lack of teacher voice in discussions of national education policy. Why weren't the people in the classroom asked for their input on ensuring that our children have the best opportunities to learn? To provide an avenue for educators to contribute to policy discussions affecting the profession both locally and nationally, the AFT established the Teacher Leaders Program.

A prominent feature of the program is that participants conduct action research on a topic of their choosing based on a local, state, or federal policy they want to study and change. Based on this research, participants have made significant improvements to their schools.

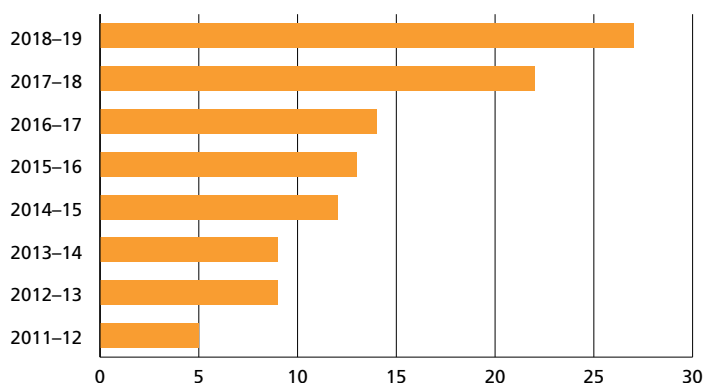
At the end of the program year, every TLP participant in each cohort presents his or her research findings at a local showcase to invited guests, which often include local legislators, school board members, school district leaders, and members of the media, as well as friends, colleagues, and family. These guests are often asked



to provide feedback on the content and delivery of the presentations. For some teachers, the presentation marks the culmination of their research on the topic, but not the end of their leadership. Indeed, this is an expectation of participants in the program. Others have used their work and their new advocacy skills to help implement their policy recommendations—sometimes with the support of a district or local leader who attended the showcase. Through this advocacy, these teachers demonstrate how teacher voice is essential in supporting what works for schools and students.

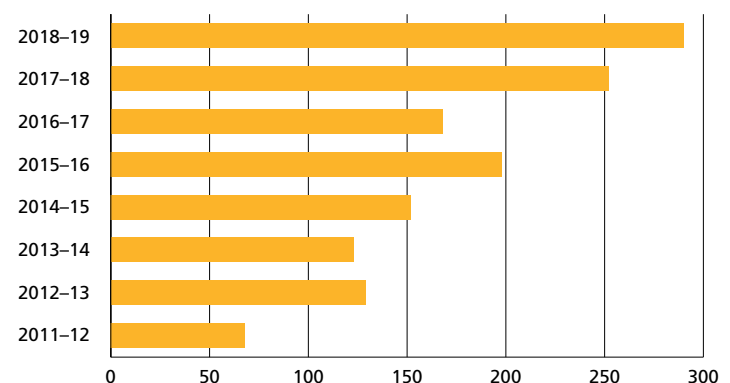
This advocacy is one important way that the TLP supports these teachers in their leadership growth. All teachers can lead by sharing information with their colleagues and by learning from one another. Other leadership roles are more formal, and they can include peer-to-peer leaders, school-level leaders, and system leaders. We have found that participants in the TLP have chosen to study a wide range of education policies, but due to the structure and requirements of the program, most have selected policies

Figure 1: Number of Local Sites



NOTE: NOT ALL LOCALS FIELD A COHORT OF PARTICIPANTS EVERY YEAR.

Figure 2: Number of Teacher Leaders





Participants have used their experiences to advocate for change based on their research.

at either the school or system level. All of the participants have been able to use their TLP experiences to advocate for change based on the evidence gathered through their research.

Peer-to-Peer Leaders

Much of the teacher leaders' work involves working with other teachers. In Nashua, TLP efforts have dealt specifically with teachers leading their peers to make positive changes in their schools. These teachers work collaboratively with colleagues to better support their students.

Nashua Teachers' Union member James Graham became a peer leader to create and implement a coteaching system in his high school. He was dismayed by student performance in his school's Algebra I courses and believed that roster flexibility and coteaching would benefit both low and high achievers.

Graham was able to test his theory by coteaching a class for one unit and comparing the scores from those students with the scores from students in the traditionally taught classes. Students in the cotaught classes showed favorable results, so Graham took his research and recommendations to his principal, which led to a larger conversation in the school around coteaching. The following year, the school had four concurrent sections of Algebra I, in which Graham and his colleagues offered further dif-

Teacher Leader Ideas

Throughout this article, we highlight some recommendations TLP participants have made based on their research.



Schools should implement a Learning Support Leadership Team, comprised of a school social worker, an administrator, school counselors, a behavior specialist, a school psychologist, school nurses, and special education teachers, to collaboratively address school climate issues and reduce barriers to student learning.



—DONNA TEUTEBERG
Albuquerque Teachers Federation
TLP Cohort 2016–2017

Incorporating restorative justice practices can significantly and positively impact the culture and climate of an individual school and an entire school district. Restorative circles should be incorporated into any instructional program regardless of subject area or grade level.



—SHERINA BONAPARTE-LATORRE
Baltimore Teachers Union
TLP Cohort 2016–2017

Create a school garden to encourage healthier eating habits and enhance cross-curricular education.



—GINA JABER
Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers
TLP Cohort 2017–2018

Testing requirements for measuring the progress of English language learners should be reasonable. ELLs should be exempted from graduation-rate calculations and from taking standardized tests used for accountability purposes until their English is proficient. Schools and school districts should not be punished for allowing ELLs, especially those with interrupted or limited formal education, more time to complete high school.



—MELISSA WENDER
Boston Teachers Union
TLP Cohort 2014–2015



“Without the support of this program and our union, we wouldn’t have felt that our voices were being heard.”

—Therese Gordon, Toledo

ferentiation through a coteaching model. Preliminary data suggest this model contributed to a slightly better than average increase in the passing rates for Algebra I.

School-Level Leaders

Many TLP teachers focus their research on topics that will have a broad impact on their schools. The teachers from Nashua who developed co- and team-teaching plans for their schools have had an impact beyond supporting their peers, as frequently happens. Other teachers have focused on policies that would impact buildingwide issues.

For example, Nashua social studies teacher Gary Hoffman focused his research on the number of early dismissals and interruptions during classes at the end of the day compared with morning classes or those in the middle of the day. From the strength of his research, Hoffman was able to set up a meeting with the district’s superintendent, the district’s assistant superintendent, and his building’s principal on the feasibility of a rotating schedule or other alternative solutions. Although the meeting was too late for immediate changes in the current school year, administrators were able to identify the problem of disruptions and significantly cut the number of announcements at the end of the day that interrupted class time.

Other examples of these school-level leaders include teachers from Toledo, Ohio. Fourth-grade special education teacher Val-

erie Powell, from the Toledo Federation of Teachers (TFT), advocated for more computer technology for students in her school. She studied the “free appropriate public education” guarantee under Section 504 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, and wanted to ensure the same opportunities were afforded to special education students as their general education peers. Due to her research and advocacy, Powell’s school purchased a cart with 30 laptops and headphones, as well as an interactive whiteboard for her classroom, so that she could enhance the educational support she was providing to her special education students. This computer cart is now available not only to her class but also to the school at large, a change that arose from the application of her research, evidence, and leadership, as well as her advocacy to improve the teaching and learning conditions in her school.

Also in Toledo, middle school teachers Therese Gordon and Kristin Haney recognized that students in their school were learning in unsafe and inadequate portable buildings. Their school board’s plans for redesigning Arlington Elementary failed to address the portable buildings that were falling apart on school grounds. Students had been using those buildings for classes since a recent reconstruction of the building, and the new plans would have left them as they were. Haney and Gordon were able to rally community support and persuade their school board to change the school design—after it had been approved—to add an entire wing to the school to house classes for grades 6–8. The two teachers used the skills they learned in the TLP to fight for their students. Gordon says that “without the support of this program and our union, we wouldn’t have felt that our voices were being heard.”

In Texas, Dana Wrann, a K–8 special education teacher and member of the San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel, wanted to find out whether mindfulness activities could affect students’ academic success and engagement. After implementing mindfulness practices at the beginning and end of each of her classes, Wrann found a statistically significant



Participants look beyond their own schools to problems they see in their districts and states, or even on the national level.

difference, based on pre- and post-surveys, in how her students felt about school, their relationships, and conflict management. With her research and findings, she went to her principal to discuss training other teachers on mindfulness practices in her school. This year, the school launched a soft rollout in which other teachers have begun to implement mindfulness with their students. Wrann has also taken this work outside of her school, conducting community trainings on mindfulness. She has written a grant based on her action research in hopes of pushing this program even further.

System Leaders

Some participants look beyond their own schools to problems they see in their districts and states, or even on the national level.

In researching issues with the district's "freshman cluster" courses, Toledo high school teacher Amy Netter discovered problems with scheduling many different students into four core classes, especially the science classes. At the conclusion of her research, she made several recommendations to the joint curriculum committee, including adding a full-time data coordinator and another science class, and scheduling a common lunch for these students. Before Netter's presentation, the committee was unaware of the issues.

TFT Vice President Mona Al-Hayani, who is also a high school teacher, recognized the serious problem of human trafficking in

Enlist a team of stakeholders, educators, and school administrators to implement the use of green cleaning products to improve student attendance and enhance student achievement for students suffering from asthma or allergies.

—KAREN MURPHY
Jefferson County AFT
TLP Cohort 2017–2018



Annual training on early childhood trauma should be provided for all school staff. Policymakers and the general public must be educated on adverse childhood experiences and their effects.

—TAMPALA BLACK
Cincinnati Federation of Teachers
TLP Cohort 2017–2018



Evaluation systems that promote collaboration and that are co-administered by the district and teacher unions can and do in fact exist. Some school districts have adopted evaluation systems that minimize the high-stakes role of standardized tests and evaluate education professionals by supporting struggling teachers and recognizing those who pursue robust professional development.

—DANIEL SANTOS
Houston Federation of Teachers
TLP Cohort 2015–2016



Increasing communication between parents and schools can be achieved through targeted action steps and collaboration between teachers and administrators. All teachers, especially new teachers, should practice effective communication strategies, so they can have confidence when sharing with parents. Just as teachers focus on improving instructional practices and skills, they should also focus on strengthening their communication skills.

—SHARON DONEGAN
Palm Beach County
Classroom Teachers Association
TLP Cohort 2017–2018



The program has helped administrators, district leaders, and communities to recognize the work teachers do.

Toledo. She was asked to work on a project for the AFT human rights and community relations department, and she used the research, advocacy, and presentation skills she developed through the Teacher Leaders Program to create professional development that she delivered to every employee in her district—from central office staff to bus drivers. Al-Hayani has worked with the AFT and TFT, the Lucas County Human Trafficking Coalition, and Toledo Public Schools to expand her professional development reach; her training is now a required part of the mandatory reporting training for all teachers in the district, and she recently addressed a group of 200 new teachers as part of this work.

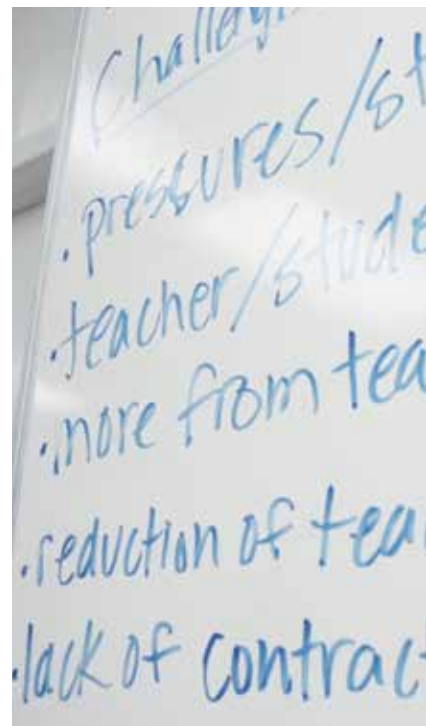
In Florida, Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association members Hazel McFarlane and Karen McFarlane (no relation) examined Exceptional Student Education (ESE) in their district, a program that provides support to students with learning, emotional, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, as well as to gifted students. Feeling empowered from their presentations of their research findings, both teachers became cochairs of the union's ESE committee.

Hazel studied how to ensure ESE teachers are equipped to improve student performance, and Karen researched the IEP

(individualized education program) administrative workload of ESE teachers and how that impacts teacher retention and student achievement. Their research will help to ensure that the needs of teachers are prominent in the work of the district's ESE department, which serves as a network and resource for parents, staff, and community members to help support the district's exceptional students. Already in their first year of cochairing the committee, Karen and Hazel have seen a vast increase in overall member participation in the committee as well as participation by the school board.

In Baltimore, Aaron Cuthrell participated in the TLP for two years, focusing his research on early childhood education. After completing the program, Cuthrell approached his principal, who helped him to start summer enrichment camps at his school for young children. The program has expanded to multiple schools across Baltimore County and Howard County and now supports hundreds of students each summer. After considering a switch to administration, Cuthrell decided to remain in the classroom, realizing the ability he had to support students while staying in teaching.

These are just a few examples of teachers creating policy through research and lessons learned from their own practice. Through the AFT Teacher Leaders Program, educators have new opportunities to engage beyond their own classrooms. They become problem solvers and give credence to the work they do every day. The program also has helped administrators, district leaders, and communities to recognize the work teachers do and the dedication they have to improving their students' lives at every level. The critical professional role that teachers play is recognized and valued in other countries, where educators are allowed regular time during the day to network with other teachers, share best



Teachers can lead at all levels— peer, school, and system.

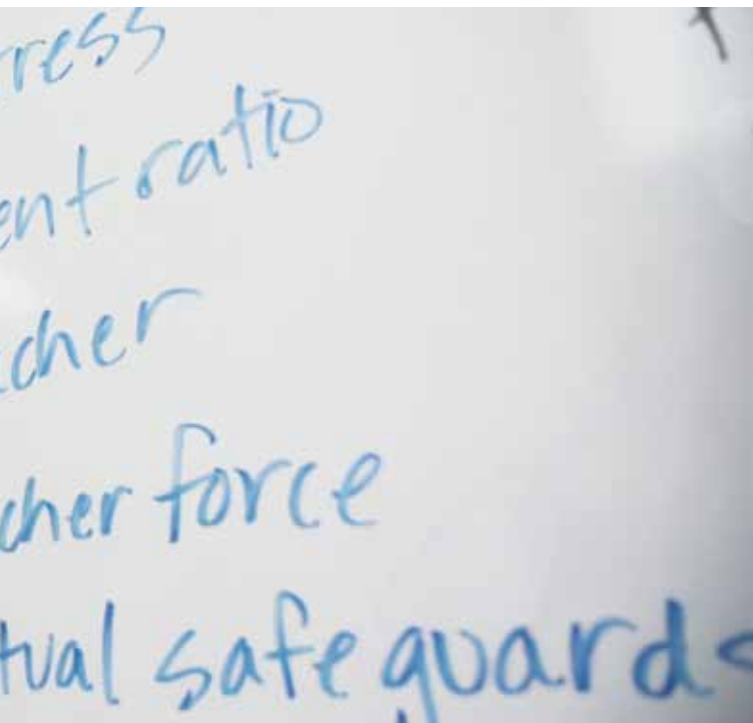
practices, and collaborate to practice and perfect their lessons.* The AFT wants to ensure that teachers in the United States have the same opportunities to collaborate and the same professional voice and respect as their counterparts in other countries.

Teachers can lead at all levels—peer, school, and system. They must be encouraged and provided with the tools and opportunities to influence policy, and that’s why the Teacher Leaders Program was developed. The AFT and its members are fighting to ensure that students across the country have every chance for success. And that means listening to and learning from the people who know the most about those students—their teachers. □

Endnotes

1. PDK Poll, “Teaching: Respect but Dwindling Appeal,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 100, no. 1 (September 2018).
2. F. M. Hess, *The Cage-Busting Teacher* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2015).

*For an in-depth comparison of teaching conditions in the United States and elsewhere in the industrialized world, see “Want to Close the Achievement Gap?” in the Winter 2014–2015 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/winter2014-2015/darling-hammond.



Member mobilization is essential in electing union-endorsed candidates in school board elections. Beyond canvassing and phone banking, social media is a great way for members to share information about candidates and highlight where they stand on education issues, and ultimately build support for them.

—FELICIA ALVAREZ
Broward Teachers Union
TLP Cohort 2017–2018



School social workers’ roles and responsibilities should shift from solely counseling specific students to servicing all students despite their academic classification. And all schools should implement a social and emotional learning program.

—KENIA JEANNITON
United Federation of Teachers
TLP Cohort 2016–2017



Elementary schools should commit to ensuring that students engage in recess at least once a day for a minimum of 20 minutes; twice a day would be better to give students downtime during the instructional day. In addition, teachers should eliminate the loss of recess as a punishment for classroom misbehavior and allow all children to participate in recess unless misbehavior occurs during recess itself.

—KAREN WEINRICH
Volusia United Educators
TLP Cohort 2016–2017



To address the high rates of teacher attrition, site-based leadership teams, professional networks, and school districts need to address the real reasons teachers leave the profession: lack of relevant, useful professional development; inattention to mitigating disruptive student behavior; inadequate school leadership; and unacceptable teaching and learning conditions.

—ASHLEY SPIKES
Washington Teachers’ Union
TLP Cohort 2016–2017



Fostering Teacher Leadership in North Syracuse

Professional educators—in the classroom, library, counseling center, or anywhere in between—share one overarching goal: ensuring all students receive the rich, well-rounded education they need to be productive, engaged citizens. In this regular feature, we explore the work of professional educators—their accomplishments and their challenges—so that the lessons they have learned can benefit students across the country. After all, listening to the professionals who do this work every day is a blueprint for success.

BY JOHN KURYLA

Nestled in the middle of central New York is the village of North Syracuse in Onondaga County, where I have lived all my life. Our area's claim to fame is that we are the "snowball capital" of the United States. Each winter, we typically get more snow than just about anywhere else in the country. For a small town, the snow here packs quite a punch, and as a longtime educator, I like to think our teachers do, too.

For the last nine years, I've been the president of the North Syracuse Education Association (NSEA). With 790 members, NSEA is among the smaller locals of the American Federation of

Teachers. But despite our lack of size, we're pretty powerful in terms of getting work done as a profession and as a union. We have a long history dating back to the early 1970s of being one of the only locals in the area going on strike to improve learning conditions for students and working conditions for teachers.

The last several years have been quite tumultuous. We've gone through an economic downturn and three superintendents. At one point, the school district had to deal with a multi-million-dollar deficit owed to the state for failed paperwork filing. But we've worked through these issues and now enjoy a strong degree of labor-management collaboration, in which our teacher leaders play a significant role.

Enabling Teachers to Grow

I could not have predicted that one day I would be helping teachers become leaders in our district. In many ways, I used to see myself as an accidental teacher leader. Twenty years



John Kuryla, pictured on page 6, has been the president of the North Syracuse Education Association since 2010 and has been in the education profession for 28 years. Previously, he taught health education in the North Syracuse Central School District.

ago, I began teaching in North Syracuse. I started out as a health educator teaching Cicero-North Syracuse High School students about themselves as well as social and community issues. Early on in my career, I learned of a grant our district was eligible for that was focused on developing a systemwide wellness program for students and faculty. I brought it to our district leaders, and the message I received from them at the time was, well, this is valuable, but it's not something we can support. The grant was really not lucrative; it was only \$10,000. Although I was disappointed by the district's response, I was not deterred.

So I went to our union president, at the time Sylvia Matousek. I explained how the grant would help us address the needs of students and teachers. She took hold of the idea, and we presented it to our district steering committee. From that point, it actually took off because the union supported me and was able to really push through the red tape of the district.

With the grant, we conducted a wellness survey that found we were doing pretty well meeting the students' needs in terms of wellness, but there was a dearth of information around supporting teachers and *their* wellness. As a result, the union helped the district create a wellness committee that did a great deal of work helping our members reach their health goals and manage stress.

Back then, I didn't understand that my advocacy on behalf of my colleagues was part of what is now broadly called "teacher leadership." But Sylvia did. She showed me how my pursuit of this grant tied into the bigger picture.

When Sylvia retired and I succeeded her as NSEA president, I continued looking for ways to advocate for teachers. And after the AFT established the Teacher Leaders Program (TLP), I jumped at the chance for our members to develop the leadership skills Sylvia had seen in me all those years ago.

In 2014, I attended a teacher leadership meeting sponsored by our state affiliate, the New York State United Teachers, where Marjorie Brown from the AFT's national office discussed the TLP. She spoke to us about the need for classroom teachers to inform policymakers about what works—and what doesn't work—in the classroom. She explained how the AFT had created the program to support local unions in building networks of classroom teachers who would research specific issues or policies they wanted to improve. My colleagues and I on the union's executive board saw this as a wonderful opportunity to connect classroom practice to education policy, so we submitted an application to join the TLP.

During the first two years, we had two cohorts of 15 teachers participate. The AFT provided training and materials, and our teachers conducted action research on topics of their choosing. In the third year, we decided to broaden the group beyond just our union. So we started pulling in members from unions in neighboring school districts, such as Chittenango and Jamesville-DeWitt. Learning about our differences and similarities in

Developing teacher leaders is one of my most important roles as a union president.



terms of where we work, and the values we all share, was very enriching.

Developing teacher leaders is one of my most important roles as a union president. Because when people are passionate about something, you want to open up avenues for them. This program provides those opportunities. What teacher leaders have in common is the passion for the work they do. I think it really comes down to the passion that they have for their profession, for their colleagues, and for their kids. They are striving to make the lives of children better. Too often in education, people spend their time acting as goalies and blocking options for improve-

ment. It's much more productive to be a facilitator allowing people to take risks, learn from them, and then grow.

Conducting Action Research

Engagement in the Teacher Leaders Program not only has produced positive changes in classroom practice and school district policy, but also has been professionally transformative for individual educators. I remember meeting a ninth-grade Spanish teacher who wanted to participate in the program. At our first meeting, she came right out and said, "Look, I am not the person who likes to go and speak in front of a crowd or go to a legislator." And I said, "Well, public speaking is part of this program." We really had to encourage her to stick with it, and she did. Her research project focused on a school policy that promoted students who barely passed Spanish in eighth grade and then moved them into ninth-grade Spanish without the necessary instructional supports. The school's policy was just to place the struggling students all in one class, but the teachers did not receive any additional supports to help these students catch up.

Through her research, this teacher showed the district that if additional supports were provided either over the summer or at the start of the school year, and if the students who barely passed eighth-grade Spanish were distributed evenly across the ninth-grade Spanish classes, then they would achieve much higher levels of success by the end of the year. Based on her work, the district changed how struggling students were assigned to classes. District officials also gave teachers greater latitude in their work with classroom pacing guides, more training around working with struggling students, and additional time to review student growth and plan lessons.

What makes this program worthwhile is that research projects don't just sit on a shelf.

As part of the TLP, participants present their research to other teachers, school administrators, and legislators and policymakers. Initially, this teacher struggled with the public speaking piece. But she overcame her fear so that she could do the right thing for her students.

Another teacher leader, who taught high school science, focused her research on multitasking with technology and its impact on student achievement. She worked with her students on a project showing them the dangers of multitasking, which included learning important life lessons, such as not texting while driving. Her work also explored how being mindful and focusing on one thing at a time contributes to student success.*

The feedback she received from her students showed her that they were not only understanding the dangers of multitasking with technology, but also, according to self-reports they completed after the project, changing their behaviors. As a former health teacher, that to me is huge.

Another memorable project went beyond the classroom to affect district policy on special education. Last year, three of our participants did independent work and then aligned their focus on our special education program and the need to modify it. In special education, we have a full inclusion model where consulting teachers, who are special education experts, meet with our classroom teachers to talk about the needs of the students and to coteach certain content. When it's done well, you can't tell the difference between the consulting teacher and the classroom teacher.

The challenge we were facing in our district was that our consulting teachers were split between multiple grade levels and needed to teach multiple curricula. As a result, they didn't have time for the coplanning required for coteaching at various grade levels, because the minute you split your time between two grade levels, you've really just doubled not only the amount of content you have to learn but also the amount of time you have to actually coplan.

Our teacher leaders presented research showing that enabling teachers to have quality planning time can help student learning. That data highlighted for the district the need to reduce the number of consulting teachers who are spread across grade levels so that they could effectively coplan with teachers at the same grade level. Based on the teachers' research, our district is now making an effort to implement dedicated coplanning time for consulting teachers at each grade level to bolster the coteaching experience in special education.

Putting Research into Practice

What makes this program worthwhile is that these research projects don't just sit on a shelf. Instead, our teachers' research is often used by district administrators. For the research presentations, various directors and even the superintendent attend to hear what the teacher leaders have found and to take notes and make sure that certain administrators or parent groups know about this work. So we've been able to take the data and then distribute it to key decision makers and other stakeholders.

The beauty of this program is that we can adapt it to local needs. However, in the beginning of the year, before we discuss those needs, our teacher leader meetings focus on action research. We review several how-to guides and watch videos of past teacher leaders presenting their research. And then we discuss the intended and unintended consequences of policy. We ask each other: How does that policy impact our work? What do we see in our classrooms and in our school communities? What do we see in our county and in our state?

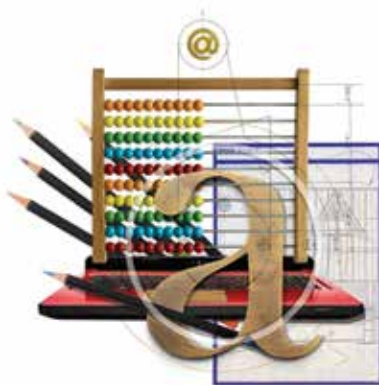
Once they decide on a topic, some participants work on their project consistently throughout the year. Others start researching right away and then work nonstop on their project until they get it done, which could take three to five weeks.

We try to honor how participants choose to do their work, but we've put in some safeguards. For instance, by January, we need to have a very clear idea about each teacher's topic, and we collect some of their drafts to see that work is being completed.

Each September, I ask for a volunteer to facilitate the group. And every year, I get four or five people who are interested, and then I meet with them individually for a conversation about their vision and goals, and how they believe this program fits in with their own philosophy and how it connects to unionism.

The support from the AFT for this program runs deep. I know AFT President Randi Weingarten values the program, not only through the professionals dedicated to running it but through the stipends all participants receive. Expecting people to come in and do this really important, rich work simply because it's the right thing to do isn't enough; they need to be compensated for their time. The amount is small, though, so we know people here aren't doing it because of the money. They're doing it because it helps them grow and helps their schools and students.

But Randi also makes room for us and invests personally in this program. I know the pace she keeps. And when we start talking about valuing the idea of time and listening and giving



*For more on technology, multitasking, and student learning, see "Have Technology and Multitasking Rewired How Students Learn?" in the Summer 2010 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/willingham-summer-10.pdf.

back, that personal support is important. Even at the highest levels of this organization, there's this idea of building capacity not only with your mega locals but with smaller ones like North Syracuse. Randi values all AFT members, and we know it. On top of that, we get her feedback. She talks to us once a year and specifically calls out the individuals for the work they do. That goes a long way.

Something else that makes the TLP special is how it brings people who don't know each other together. By the second or third meeting, these people are a team. They are spread throughout our district and neighboring districts. Oftentimes, they have not met each other beforehand, and now they're here talking about education and what students need and where schools can improve. After the program, participants repeatedly thank me for giving them the ability to meet with colleagues and talk about important education issues.

The program has helped participants begin to see themselves not just as teacher leaders but as union leaders. A facilitator this year told me she never saw herself as a unionist or a union-minded person, which is funny because her mother was one of our building chairs for a number of years. But the TLP helped her see the value of her union in leading on issues of professionalism.

In fact, teacher leaders build our union capacity and member engagement. I see it most predominantly with our newer teachers who come on board. They really don't have a solid understanding of what the union is or does. Through the TLP, the union enables a number of like-minded people to come together and discuss important issues in the school. When you're teaching kids, you don't have the opportunity to do that. And neither do you often have the chance to speak with school board members or county legislators.

In the winter, I make sure that our teacher leaders and I visit our state legislative offices. There, we discuss issues that pertain to public education. And these teacher leaders are credible. The legislators here already know me, but when I bring in my teacher leaders, it provides them with a different perspective. Through such meetings, teacher leaders can see the power of their own voice and the power of their profession. They see firsthand how they can share what they know with people who have the ability to create change.

Besides talking with legislators, our teacher leaders speak with teachers outside the program to share what they're learning. In fact, our teacher leaders have homework assignments in which they must go back to their school buildings and discuss topics from teacher leader meetings. We also make it a point to welcome visitors to our meetings. For example, at an upcoming TLP meeting, two school board members will come to talk about our school board, how it functions, and the issues that the board currently finds pressing. This is a really rich topic for our teachers to hear.

A lot of times, people see unionists as fist-pounding individuals focused on the contract. But when we start talking

Informing policy and advocating for our students is absolutely our work, and it is how we're going to change the system.

about policy and its implications for the work we do in our classrooms, they tell me they didn't realize teachers had the power to inform policy or that it is part of our work. Informing policy and advocating for our students is absolutely our work, and it is how we're going to change the system. This program gives us the platform to explain that we know what we're doing because we're in the classroom with students, and by the way, here's the research that proves that what we're advocating for works.

For teachers who have been in an environment where they know they have a voice, and for teachers looking to share more of themselves and learn more in the process and be a support for their colleagues, the TLP is the place to go. It's going to give them not only an idea of how the school system works and how the union works, but also a road map to help create real change in the system. And it will help them to recognize that for any school system or corporation or business, there's a path and a process. This is the best model to develop those leadership characteristics across the board.



In our district, teacher leadership extends beyond the Teacher Leaders Program. Since 2011, our educators have participated in a successful Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program—a hallmark of strong labor-management collaboration—in which veteran teachers mentor and coach probationary teachers for three to four years before they come up for tenure.[†] In fact, a facilitator in our TLP is also a consultant teacher in PAR. Through both PAR and teacher leaders, it's clear that our union values improving the system through the contributions of educators.

In today's climate, being progressive when it comes to professionalism is how we're going to move our union forward. I continue to hear teachers say we need to be treated like professionals. Everything that we've done to empower teachers through the Teacher Leaders Program and PAR shows that we truly are taking care of our profession. □

[†]For more on Peer Assistance and Review, see "Taking the Lead" in the Fall 2008 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/goldstein.pdf.

Activating Your Professional Power

For classroom teachers to harness their professional power, they must raise their collective voice, engage in collective action, and exercise their right to organize. In the past 12 months, educators in West Virginia, Arizona, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Los Angeles, and elsewhere have done just that.

For years, staff shortages, lack of resources, and overcrowded classrooms have led to burnout and overwhelmed our nation's talented teachers. A 2018 report published by the AFT, "A Decade of Neglect," demonstrates what happens when funding for public education gets slashed time and time again. Even as other sectors have recovered from the Great Recession, funding for schools has not returned to its pre-recession figures. This is unacceptable.

Union activism is on the rise. Just look at the increasing number of protests, the walkouts, and the backlash against a backward way of thinking about teachers and their unions. We've been in several conversations where administrators or consultants have lamented the inability to hold professional learning without compensating teachers, as if treating teachers well runs counter to the interest of students.

This myth is one that we need to work hard to dispel. A reliance on overworked,

stressed teachers, coupled with a lack of funding for support staff and resources, negatively affects students. So what can educators do? We know that workers' ability to organize is one of the best hopes of creating thriving cities and towns. See the Share My Lesson resources "Organized Labor and the American Dream" and "People Power Section 3: Strikes" to learn for yourself—and also teach your students—how engaged citizens can change the world through harnessing their collective power.

Increasing Teacher Voice in Decision Making

Many teachers are afraid to speak up because they just want to focus on doing the best they can for their students. But if we don't add our collective voice, decisions will continue to be made *to us*, not *with us* or in our students' best interests. See our "Teacher Leadership" resource page and a blog post on elevating your teacher voice. We must rise up.

Teachers can also share the AFT's report on the incredible effects of educator-led collaborations and solutions, and a blog post on how distributed leadership empowers school staff. Share My Lesson includes a wealth of opportunities for free

professional development, news stories, and ways to network with colleagues. Let's use these resources to elevate the profession as a whole.

Sharing Our Perspective

As educators, we have a unique lens into student experiences with a wide range of issues, such as autism, sexual assault, and immigration enforcement. Legislators and the larger community need to hear our perspectives because we have important ideas and information to share.

Share My Lesson contains resources for each of these areas and more. See our resources on supporting students with autism, lesson plans from our partner Stop Sexual Assault in Schools, and a webinar on how immigration enforcement policies are impacting students and teachers.

Educators are often considered the backbone of a democratic society. Even with all the forces arrayed against us, educator unions are increasing in number and influence. This is good news and a trend that must continue.

Do you have ideas for how Share My Lesson can bolster your professional power? Email us at content@sharemylesson.com.

—THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM



Recommended Resources

A Decade of Neglect
<http://go.aft.org/ae119sml1>

Organized Labor and the American Dream
<http://go.aft.org/ae119sml2>

People Power Section 3: Strikes
<http://go.aft.org/ae119sml3>

Teacher Leadership
<http://go.aft.org/ae119sml4>

Five Tips for Elevating Your Teacher Voice
<http://go.aft.org/ae119sml5>

A Big Bet on Educator-Led Collaborations and Solutions
<http://go.aft.org/ae119sml6>

Distributed Leadership Empowers School Staff
<http://go.aft.org/ae119sml7>

Supporting Students with Autism
<http://go.aft.org/ae119sml8>

Stop Sexual Assault in Schools
<http://go.aft.org/ae119sml9>

How Immigration Enforcement Policies Are Impacting Students and Teachers Nationwide
<http://go.aft.org/ae119sml10>

Reading and Teaching the Rainbow

Making Elementary School Classrooms LGBTQ-Inclusive



BY JILL M. HERMANN-WILMARTH AND
CAITLIN L. RYAN

People are sometimes shocked by the notion that teachers should address lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) topics in elementary schools. Maybe they think children those ages are too young, that those conversations are better had at home, or that the whole topic is simply inappropriate. Such concerns often arise because people assume talking about people who identify as LGBTQ means talking about sex. That is not what we believe at all.

Instead, when we advocate for elementary school teachers to address LGBTQ topics, we simply want them to talk about the diversity of families and relationships and communities in ways that include LGBTQ people. After all, public schools are for everyone, yet many elementary schools are too frequently unwelcoming and unaccommodating of all children, especially children of LGBTQ parents or those who are or may be LGBTQ themselves. LGBTQ people exist in children's lives in myriad

ways. If children themselves don't have LGBTQ parents, perhaps they have a peer with two moms at daycare or a relative who comes out as gay, or maybe they've heard a story about transgender rights on the news. Elementary school students are surrounded by these experiences, but their teachers are often underprepared when it comes to realizing why LGBTQ topics might matter to their work as elementary school teachers and how they might make their classrooms more inclusive.

As queer-identified women and former elementary school teachers who now work in universities as teacher educators, we've spent the past decade developing a range of approaches to help elementary school teachers integrate LGBTQ-inclusive practices into their teaching: *expanding representations* of LGBTQ people, *questioning categories* with regard to gender and sexuality, and *questioning representations* within LGBTQ-inclusive texts. We know that no two states, districts, schools, nor teachers are exactly alike; we know that what works one place might be impossible or ineffective in another. But we also believe that every teacher can do *something* to help make her or his classroom safer and more inclusive to better serve LGBTQ children and families.* These approaches provide options to help everyone find something that works no matter the context.

Below we explain why LGBTQ-inclusive elementary school instruction matters, outline the approaches we have developed

Jill M. Hermann-Wilmarth is a professor of social foundations at Western Michigan University. Caitlin L. Ryan is an associate professor in the College of Education at East Carolina University. Parts of this article are excerpted from Caitlin L. Ryan and Jill M. Hermann-Wilmarth, Reading the Rainbow: LGBTQ-Inclusive Literacy Instruction in the Elementary Classroom (New York: Teachers College Press). Reprinted by permission of the publisher. Copyright © 2018 by Teachers College, Columbia University. All rights reserved.

*To learn how schools can help LGBTQ students thrive, see "More Than a Safe Space" in the Winter 2016–2017 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/winter2016-2017/sadowski.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GWENDIA KACZOR

and have used in real-life classrooms, and suggest resources for teachers as they do this work. This article draws from our book, *Reading the Rainbow: LGBTQ-Inclusive Literacy Instruction in the Elementary Classroom*, where we also provide examples from our work as coteachers and researchers with second-, fourth-, and fifth-grade teachers in Michigan and Ohio to illustrate what each of these methods can look like in practice.

Including LGBTQ topics in elementary school classrooms is important to do for all children.

Why LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum Matters in Elementary Schools

Research shows that including LGBTQ topics in elementary schools makes a positive difference to the learning environment of a wide variety of students. For example, 75.2 percent of LGBTQ students in schools with an inclusive curriculum said their peers were accepting of LGBTQ people, compared with 39.6 percent of those without an inclusive curriculum.¹ This acceptance is particularly important for the estimated 6 million people with one or more LGBTQ parents.²

However, only half of elementary school teachers (49 percent) say a student with a lesbian, gay, or bisexual parent would feel comfortable at the school where they teach, and only 42 percent think that would be true for a student with a transgender parent.³ Even though most elementary school teachers address family diversity generally, only 2 in 10 elementary students (18 percent) actually learn about families with two moms or two dads.⁴ This silence sends a message to children with LGBTQ parents that their families are not “real” families and that their families are not accepted in schools.

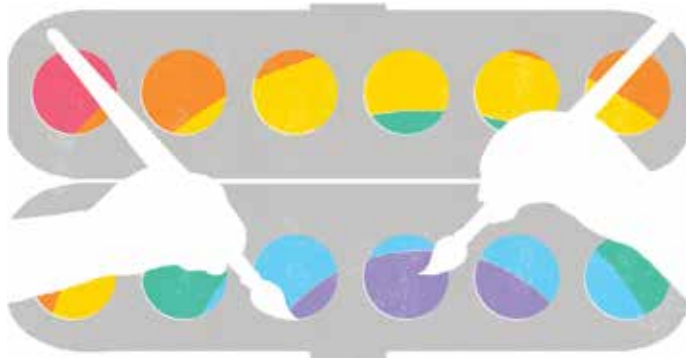
Including LGBTQ topics in elementary school classrooms is also important for children who themselves identify as LGBTQ, whether they come out while they are young or, more commonly, later in life. After all, every LGBTQ adult was once a school-age child. Unfortunately, many of those children never see LGBTQ people included in the curriculum. And, too often, they see their teachers fail to intervene when other students use the term “gay” in hateful ways; sometimes they even hear such slurs from teachers themselves.⁵

These behaviors also affect children who are bullied for being perceived as LGBTQ. Because LGBTQ people have historically been feared, hated, and discriminated against, words to describe LGBTQ people are often used by children to shame people of all identities whose behaviors fall outside the norm. What teachers do and say in response can have implications for children for years to come.

Elementary schools are also affected by the increased awareness about the lives and needs of transgender children. Trans-

gender children are those who, having been assigned a gender at birth, consistently and persistently insist they are actually a different gender.⁶ Sometimes children identify as a different gender as young as age 3.⁷ Pediatricians and psychologists suggest, and recent research findings confirm, that supporting the gender identity a child asserts is an important part of healthy development.⁸ This means elementary schools should be ready to affirm transgender children and their families in order to support children’s mental health and development.

Lastly, including LGBTQ topics in elementary school classrooms is important to do for all children because we all live in a world with LGBTQ people. Children—even if they have a mom and a dad, identify as straight, and fit gender norms—will



encounter LGBTQ people in their families, schools, workplaces, and communities. When teachers implement a curriculum that ignores these realities, students are left on their own to process what they hear about LGBTQ people in popular culture and to learn respectful language for talking about LGBTQ topics. Just as white people must be invested in ending racism and men must stand up for women’s rights, non-LGBTQ people have an important role to play in making the world safer for and more inclusive of LGBTQ people. Schools teach children about the world and equip students to live in it; that world includes people who identify as LGBTQ, and therefore schools should include LGBTQ topics. The following approaches will help educators understand how to do that.

1. Expanding Representations with LGBTQ-Inclusive Texts

One of the best and most direct ways to make your classroom safer for and more inclusive of LGBTQ people and families is to have books that feature LGBTQ characters. As author Rudine Sims Bishop⁹ first argued decades ago, books serve as “windows and mirrors.” “Mirror books” validate for readers that they are not alone, that their identity or life experience is not strange, and that there is a community of people just like them out there. When readers receive mirrors for parts of themselves, they get the message that their experiences are worth writing about and are worth being read. “Window books,” on the other hand, give readers insight into another person’s experience. Rather than show readers more of themselves, these books show the way into other worlds that readers haven’t seen firsthand but can learn from nevertheless. They remind students that not everyone is exactly like them, and they help prepare students for the complexity and diversity of the larger world.¹⁰

As teachers, we need to remember that all readers deserve a

balance of windows and mirrors. It is this balance that helps us feel affirmed while also moving beyond our own experiences. It helps children recognize they are not alone while at the same time reminding them that they live in a world with other people who are different from them. Both sides of this equation are important. Therefore, when we bring books with LGBTQ people and families into our classrooms—much like when we ensure we have books in our classrooms representing different races, ethnicities, and life experiences—we expand the number of mirrors available for LGBTQ students or children of LGBTQ families, while also expanding the number of windows available for everyone else.

So how does a teacher include a book with LGBTQ characters in her teaching? The short answer is just like you'd include any other book! You could put it on your shelf for a child to find on his or her own. You could recommend it to a child who you think would enjoy it or offer it as an option for literature circles, book clubs, or paired reading groups. Or you could read it aloud, maybe even highlighting it in your teaching. Reading a book can be a wonderful way to open up conversations about topics we don't often discuss in schools because the book can do so much of the work. You'll likely find that your adult worries about reading LGBTQ-inclusive books in the classroom are rarely shared by your students. After all, in addition to sending important messages about who belongs and who is worthy of being represented, many LGBTQ-inclusive books are also compelling and interesting reads that students and teachers alike truly enjoy. When Jill cotaught with a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher who read Alex Gino's *George* aloud, every time the teachers closed the book at the end of the day's reading, students would groan loudly and beg for "just one more chapter!" In a classroom Caitlin visited regularly, Patricia Polacco's *In Our Mothers' House*, Cheryl Kilodavis' *My Princess Boy*, and James Howe's *Totally Joe* were popular choices during silent reading time.

Reading LGBTQ-inclusive books doesn't have to be done on a special day or otherwise separated from your curriculum. When writing a book report on *In Our Mothers' House*, for example, a fifth-grade student we know read it independently, summarized the text, identified themes, evaluated the author's writing, and made both text-to-self and text-to-world connections. Because his teacher had included LGBTQ content in classroom discussions prior to his writing of this report, he was able to critically think about that content in sophisticated ways.

When teaching the expected content standards for your grade level, there are many opportunities for this kind of integration. LGBTQ-inclusive stories like *Asha's Mums* or *Donovan's Big Day* can be incorporated into language arts units on literary elements like understanding characters, comparing and contrasting, sequencing, understanding descriptive language, or finding the theme of a text. You could add *King & King* to genre studies of fairy tales and explore *Lumberjanes* or *The Popularity Papers* in investigations of graphic novels and/or series books. You could incorporate books such as *And Tango Makes Three* or *Daddy, Papa, and Me* or *The Family Book* into an exploration of family structures in social studies. In all these cases, you can teach required content while still providing important representations to your students.

2. Questioning Categories with Books You Already Use

If it's difficult for you, given your school or district, to read books with LGBTQ characters in them, you can make your classroom safer

and more inclusive of LGBTQ people and families by discussing gender and relationships generally in broader ways, even when reading books you already teach. After all, gender is relevant for children of all ages. While gender and sexuality are not the same things, an idea called the heterosexual matrix¹¹ shows how they become interrelated in our culture. We expect that women will have female bodies, will act feminine, and will want to date and partner with men. We expect that men will have male bodies, will act masculine, and will want to date and partner with women. Of course, in reality, all these categories are much more complicated, but we continually revert to these basic ideas. Ask almost any young child to draw a picture of a girl, and she will have long hair. We might know plenty of girls and women with short hair and boys with long hair too, but culturally, we teach that a way to distinguish boys from girls is, among other characteristics, to look at hair.

Reading LGBTQ-inclusive books doesn't have to be done on a special day or otherwise separated from your curriculum.

By expanding our ideas about any one piece of this puzzle—how boys or girls should look and act, for example—we make space in the whole system, creating more room for people who live any part of it differently than our stereotypes suggest. If we help students see there aren't strict rules about what girls and boys can do or how girls and boys should be, then we help to blur those divisions between categories. This blurring can help students learn to respect people who live those categories differently. When

people disrupt any of the matrix categories through their gender identity, through their gender expression, or with whom and how they might fall in love, they are queering—disrupting and expanding—the heterosexual matrix to make more kinds of lives and loves visible.

Teaching in this way, a method that we call "questioning categories," means helping your students investigate how both people in the real world and characters in books disrupt the heterosexual matrix and to what effect. We believe such questioning helps students become aware of and more sensitive to the multiple ways of "doing gender" or being in relationships.

Why, for example, does Kate DiCamillo's *Despereaux* make his mother so disappointed that he isn't big and strong? Why does he get in so much trouble for being a mouse who doesn't act like other mice and who falls in love with someone he's not supposed to? Why is it a big deal for Charlotte Zolotow's *William* to have a doll? Why does his dad care so much and get so angry about it?



Why is Jacqueline Kelly's Calpurnia Tate so worried about having no interest in "female" jobs such as cooking and sewing as would be expected of her, recognizing instead that her "nature" was leading her to be a scientist?



Books like these, as well as others, including Michael Hall's *Red: A Crayon's Story* and Tomie DePaola's *Oliver Button Is a Sissy*, provide indirect yet important opportunities to reflect on what we think about and how we treat people who don't behave in ways society expects. Such conversations can easily be connected to students' lives and real-world experiences in ways that can broaden their understanding of LGBTQ people and families, even without reading terms like "gay" and "lesbian."

It's particularly helpful to identify books that show characters of different races, classes, religions, and gender expressions.

Other considerations might also be useful when questioning categories and expanding the heterosexual matrix. For example, when reading nonfiction, students and teachers can consider how there are different expectations and assumptions made about a person based on gender, and how those expectations inform how we understand gender as a culture. Likewise, teachers can ask students to think about the kinds of relationships between people in the texts they are reading. Are they based in assumptions about who is "allowed" to be connected to each other? What knowledge does the author assume the reader has about how men and women or boys and girls act and relate to each other? Is a story shaped by the character's refusal to conform to social norms? How so? Does the way the character looks to others match the way he understands himself? What happens to people who don't fit in? Whose relationships do people make fun of and why? Questioning categories in these ways provides an important lens through which your students can engage with the characters in books, as well as develop critical reading and thinking skills.

3. Questioning Representations in LGBTQ Books

In her now-famous TED talk, Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie¹² discussed what she calls the danger of the single story: the stereotype or surface-level picture of a person, place, or event. The problem with relying on such stereotypes, Adichie says, isn't that they're incorrect necessarily, but that they're *incomplete*. By treating a single representation of the story as the full story about a particular identity category, people create limited, ultimately inaccurate portrayals. Therefore, even though

expanding representations by including even one book with an LGBTQ character provides new "windows and mirrors" for readers, the danger of the single story reminds us that it is only one specific portrayal and not a representation of an entire community.

One way to address this is to try to layer different representations in order to provide students the most nuanced, complex, thorough picture of a community. Therefore, the third approach, questioning representations, brings together the first two; it helps you include representations of LGBTQ people while still questioning norms and silences involved in those representations. In other words, this approach helps us move away from asking simply if LGBTQ people are represented and instead turn our attention more specifically to how they are represented and what the overall message is of those representations. This questioning of categories even within LGBTQ-inclusive texts can help students see more possibilities for other people and for themselves.

This work is especially important because many of the LGBTQ representations in children's books are of white, cisgender, partnered, middle-class adults. Helping students notice the (relative) absence of other, more diverse LGBTQ experiences within the books they read expands students' worldviews about who LGBTQ people are. In addition to books, you can layer representations with text sets, videos, newspaper articles of current events, and guest speakers. Such work also supports standards related to research skills, reading from multiple perspectives, the use of textual evidence, and comparing and contrasting to build understanding.

It's particularly helpful to identify books that show characters of different races, classes, religions, and gender expressions. An example we love and have read with students is Jacqueline Woodson's *After Tupac and D Foster*. When reading that text, we help students explore how the queerness of a black character like Tash informs that character's life in different ways than does the queerness of a white character such as James Howe's Joe in *The Misfits* and *Totally Joe*. Both Tash and Joe, like all of us, have intersecting identities¹³: they are not just gay or just male, but are gay and male and belong to a specific race and class all at the same time in one body.

Because these books give readers the opportunity to enter the lives of very different people, students more easily see how multiple identities intersect. Just as important, the single story of being gay, too often understood in terms of how white wealthy people experience it, is interrupted. The richness of these texts deeply engages students and stimulates a desire to understand the worlds that the characters live in, while simultaneously supporting connections to their own lives.

Getting Started

Because including LGBTQ topics in elementary schools is still somewhat rare, we know you might have concerns about how it will work in your classroom. For that reason, it can be good to think through what concerns you have so you can brainstorm ways to meet those challenges. Sometimes teachers are worried about saying the wrong thing, or what will happen if they don't know the answer to a child's question. Trust us that *everyone* feels this way sometimes. Knowing all of the right words is not the goal. The willingness to try, to be open to continually learning, to revise the ways that we speak or label or present an idea,

is what all good teaching is about, including LGBTQ-inclusive teaching. It's always OK to tell a child that you don't know something or that you aren't sure but that you can look up the answer together. It's also OK to say something like, "That's a better question for you to ask your families at home."

Another concern that we hear from teachers is that they fear resistance from parents of their students and/or from their school administrators. Each situation is different, of course, but at schools we've worked with, resistance has come from a very small number of parents; the vast majority have not minded and have even supported this work.¹⁴ But the fear of parental resistance is real. Therefore, it is useful to have thought through and to be able to articulate to others why you are doing this work. We suggest relying on research, including the findings cited in this article and other statistics from GLSEN (www.glsen.org), about the power of inclusive classrooms. You may decide to send home a statement at the beginning of the year about how you are committed to ensuring that all students have a safe space to learn or about how your class will read and discuss a variety of identities and communities over the year. Responding to resistance may also involve understanding and communicating the ways the LGBTQ-inclusive teaching that you do connects to your mandated standards or is in keeping with district policies, particularly antibullying or nondiscrimination policies.



It's important to recognize that states have different laws with regard to LGBTQ inclusion in schools. You can learn more about your state's laws by visiting the Human Rights Campaign's website (www.hrc.org/state-maps). There, you might note what protections are available in states that have LGBTQ-inclusive antibullying and nondiscrimination laws as well as any legal restrictions that apply to your state. If you teach in one of the seven states (Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas) that currently have some kind of "No Promo Homo" law that doesn't allow teachers to say the words "gay" or "lesbian," it might make more sense for you to use questioning categories (approach No. 2) to LGBTQ inclusion rather than expanding representations (approach No. 1). To ensure that you are up to date on your specific context, consult directly with organizations like GLSEN, the Human Rights Campaign, the American Civil Liberties Union (www.aclu.org), or a state-level LGBTQ advocacy group.

No matter where you teach, it will be helpful to build your knowledge and locate sources of support. Finding parents and other teachers who are interested in LGBTQ-inclusive teaching

can be a way to build networks and generate new ideas. In addition to research, GLSEN offers lesson plans, professional development opportunities, and other resources for educators. The Human Rights Campaign's "Welcoming Schools" project (www.welcomingschools.org) is elementary-school focused and offers book lists, training opportunities, and lesson plans.

Many professional organizations also have statements that speak to the importance of LGBTQ inclusion and resources for teachers doing such work. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), for example, has an Intellectual Freedom Center (www.ncte.org/action/anti-censorship) to help teachers should any book they use be challenged or censored. NCTE's website contains policy statements, a rationale for reading banned books, and activities to use when teaching books that are frequently challenged. And, of course, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is another important source of support as you begin doing the work of LGBTQ inclusion in your classrooms. The AFT's website (www.aft.org/special-populations-resources#LGBT) offers many such resources.

Elementary schools are a microcosm of our larger world, full of diverse identities, ideologies, and approaches.

Elementary schools are a microcosm of our larger world, full of diverse identities, ideologies, and approaches to teaching and learning. Of course, this can cause messiness, false starts, redos, and unintentional errors, just like it does in the world outside of schools.

But when that diversity is recognized, incorporated, and celebrated in elementary schools, it can create learning spaces that teach all students how to treat one another and that are welcoming to all students and families, including those in the LGBTQ community. These are the elementary schools that students and families deserve. Let's work together to make them a reality. □

Endnotes

1. J. G. Kosciw et al., *The 2015 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools* (New York: GLSEN, 2016).
2. G. J. Gates, "LGB Families and Relationships: Analyses of the 2013 National Health Interview Survey," Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, October 2014.
3. GLSEN and Harris Interactive, *Playgrounds and Prejudice: Elementary School Climate in the United States; a Survey of Students and Teachers* (New York: GLSEN, 2012).
4. GLSEN and Harris Interactive, *Playgrounds and Prejudice*.
5. GLSEN and Harris Interactive, *Playgrounds and Prejudice*; and Kosciw et al., *2015 National School Climate Survey*.
6. J. Rafferty, "Gender-Diverse and Transgender Children," *American Academy of Pediatrics* (2018), www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Gender-Non-Conforming-Transgender-Children.aspx; and C. Meier and J. Harris, "Fact Sheet: Gender Diversity and Transgender Identity in Children," Society for the Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, American Psychological Association Division 44, www.apadivisions.org/division-44/resources/advocacy/transgender-children.pdf.

(Continued on page 40)

Art in School

As Essential as Language



BY PHILIP YENAWINE

Humans have made pictures since the beginning of time. Before any record of written language, people painted. Take, for example, ancient walls covered in drawings, like those found in the Lascaux caves in France created by Paleolithic humans estimated to have lived as far back as 16,000 BCE.¹

Perhaps image-making is a basic instinct. Given the chance, children draw and paint as soon as they can hold the tools—certainly before they can easily talk. Early on, they make what seem to adults like random marks, but soon enough, surveys of children’s drawings show a universe of schemes they develop for representing what they’ve seen.

“What they’ve seen” is a compilation that begins as soon as infants can focus. It’s another instinct for all sighted children—they figure things out by looking. Tiny babies quickly recognize their parents and siblings and figure out that each one attends to them in a different way. They recognize that different expressions

mean different things, a smile different from a worried look, for example. We can see their awareness in their expressions. But this is just the beginning. Babies continue to search their worlds with their eyes, and as they grow, their visual insights build. Dogs are differentiated from cats, and different sizes and shapes are accommodated within the overall categories. By the time they are 3 and 4, all are adept at figuring out a great deal from looking around.

This “figuring out” is referred to by the cognitive scholar Rudolf Arnheim as “visual thinking.” In his book of that name, he details the instantaneous and productive processing by the brain of what the eye takes in.²

Caregivers and early childhood educators make use of the curiosity, desire to know, and visual acuity of children to provide much of the basis for language and other learning. Playing on their incessant looking, the people around them who know to do so name what a baby’s gaze seems to rest on. They chat with the child about what happens during the course of days—while eating, taking walks, playing, bathing, and so on. They narrate during wanders through parks, zoos, and stores, connecting what is seen and experienced to words and sentences. They introduce illustrated books that captivate children’s attention and provide a useful bridge from seeing to talking to reading.

When books and reading aloud are in the mix of resources made available, illustrations help children learn language by several means. They offer a parallel version of the story told in words, one that can be decoded using a child’s visual skills. They allow a child to see what words mean as they are read aloud,

Philip Yenawine is a cofounder of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) and the Watershed Collaborative, established to increase access to VTS, and the former director of education at the Museum of Modern Art. Parts of this article are excerpted with permission from his books Visual Thinking Strategies: Using Art to Deepen Learning across School Disciplines (2013) and Visual Thinking Strategies for Preschool: Using Art to Enhance Literacy and Social Skills (2018). Both titles are published by Harvard Education Press. For more information, please visit <https://bit.ly/2Szck0> and <https://bit.ly/2N2Svql>.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERGE BLOCH

anchoring sounds and words in images. Illustrations often provide nuances and details not covered in the text, enriching the content of the minimal written story.

The situations and phenomena depicted as well as described in words give children bite-sized slices of the complexity of the world they see around them, aids to comprehension of what is taken in overall. As children focus on what they see as they listen, the seeing-hearing combination reinforces their gradually building vocabularies and ability to communicate.

In other words, thoughtful caregivers know they are responsible for creating visual and language-rich environments that stimulate and support early learning. The richness, however, varies from family to family and is complicated by many factors, such as demographics, socioeconomic status, and the language spoken by parents and caregivers. The differences are significant. Children who are deprived of resources and conversation enter school at a disadvantage.³

Diane Zimmerman—a veteran educator, child speech pathologist, writer, and retired superintendent from the Old Adobe Union School District in California—remarks:

Most teachers in the early grades believe in developmental learning. During the last decades, however, the emphasis has so shifted to text-based instruction, even in kindergarten, that we forget to capitalize on the natural ability of children to look, listen, and talk about their environment. By the time they enter school, children have demonstrated a natural ability to direct their learning toward what helps them make sense of the world. Children need to keep looking—and looking and talking—all through the middle years, a time of great cognitive creativity and drive. The brain has been primed to weave together all manner of learning to create deep understandings of the world. This developmental period signifies an emergence from dependency, with children becoming more independent while continuing to broaden their knowledge and skills. The ease of finding images, sounds, and videos on the internet has opened a way for the teacher to bring this rich visual and auditory world, free of text, into the classroom, and it's a mistake not to do it.⁴

Guided looking, even done informally, has a huge impact on early childhood preparation for elementary school and is an effective way to address learning inequities. Why, therefore, does it play such a small role in schooling?

Introducing Works of Art

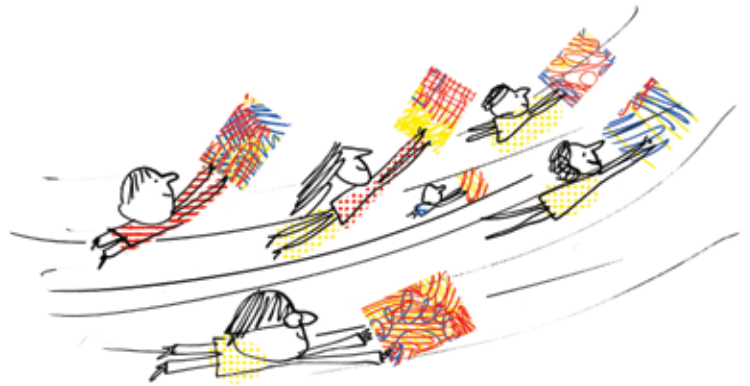
This is a question that occupied me during my long career working in art museums, where the adults, once visually acute 4-year-olds, arrive wanting basic help finding meaning in the diverse images on view. Since they were adept at figuring things out from looking when they were little, what happens to decrease this remarkable visual literacy? I think Zimmerman hits the nail on the head: “The emphasis has so shifted to text-based instruction, even in kindergarten, that we forget to capitalize on the natural ability of children to look, listen, and talk about their environment.”

For the past 30 years, I've been on a mission to maintain this literacy in young people and, more specifically, to get art into the lives of all children. But why art? Because works of art pose

approachable problems that kids can unravel using existing visual and cognitive skills. While illustrations have to be pretty straightforward to communicate effectively, not so art; the vocabularies used to convey meaning in art are varied, and most are demanding. Art images are ambiguous and multilayered, providing fodder for both thinking and the ongoing growth of the language needed to convey complexity.

I've long known that there is only one possible way to integrate art into young people's lives: working with teachers and schools. To be meaningful to our educational partners in schools, however,

Visual and language-rich environments stimulate and support early learning.



my colleagues and I had to go beyond what we were doing in museums. At the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City, where I was the director of education for a decade, we actually found that our teaching engaged visitors (including kids) and was enjoyed by them, but it didn't accomplish its other intentions: reviving the skills people had when they entered school. We knew we needed new strategies to help museum visitors in ways they wanted. But importantly, we needed methods that would prove powerful in ways that would convince teachers and administrators to add something to an already packed curriculum.

The result of much effort was Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). VTS is a program that enables teachers to use specific strategies as part of their existing curriculum to develop students' skills of observation, social interaction, and language development. It evolved over the course of more than a dozen years of field research to see if and how it worked—what teachers and students of all ages experienced, how teachers used it, and what growth it produced. Cognitive psychologist Abigail Housen and I led the team, and the story of that work is described in my book *Visual Thinking Strategies: Using Art to Deepen Learning across School Disciplines*.

We first drafted VTS during the 1990–1991 school year, when I was still at MoMA. Housen and I hoped the teaching would jumpstart the skills museum visitors thought they lacked, which limited

their pleasure looking at art. We turned to schools to test our lessons, collaborating with teachers who would let us visit their classrooms to get some sense of the impact, and who would let us collect data from students over time, which is hard to do in museums because visits are usually infrequent and informal.

Given our intention to revive viewing skills—another way of saying “visual literacy”—we relied on data to help us start the learning process. For more than 15 years, Housen had been studying how people think when looking at art. She could describe how the brain processed observations and how the cognition changed as experience grew. We used this as the basis for creating lessons that enabled students to put existing skills—the ability to observe, to talk, and to make sense of observations, for example—to work as the first step in the teaching/learning process.

VTS is a discussion-based approach that supports teachers in introducing art images for students to consider and discuss.

We also knew what skills were within reach. We could therefore add challenges appropriately to increase students’ ability to find meanings in art and other images. We watched and documented what happened and folded what we learned into extensions of the original lessons as well as into frequent revisions. Below is a distillation of the results.

Sparking Discussion

VTS is a discussion-based approach that supports teachers in introducing art images for students to consider and discuss. Finding appropriate images—with uncomplicated, recognizable narratives for little ones, and more complex ones for older students—is easy, particularly given search engines like Google Images. All one needs to do is think about what stories would engage and excite a particular class of kids. Two images that work well for all ages are shown on page 25: Palmer Hayden’s “The Janitor Who Paints” and John Singer Sargent’s “The Birthday Party.”

Discussions work best in a group of peers, as opposed to situations where participants have unequal expertise regarding a subject. While it is a challenge to hear from all who want to speak, even classes of 30 or more students can engage in a reasonable discussion. To create an opportunity for all to contribute, we recommend leading several discussions in a row, roughly 12 to 15 minutes for each.

To begin the process of discovery about an unfamiliar topic, play to students’ ability to make observations by choosing images like these two that depict at least some familiar and recognizable people, places, things, and activities. Search for images that contain enough that is familiar to prompt many observations. The two examples on the following page provide some clues as to what works. For example, one shows a man doing something—the paint brush, familiar to many, suggests exactly what he’s up to—

with a woman and child sitting nearby. Very few clues suggest what he’s painting, however, and many other aspects of the setting, while recognizable, provoke a certain amount of wonder. Young children spend more time identifying what they see, and it’s great when a teacher can supply the missing words—“easel,” for example, or “palette”—even when the thing itself is recognized. They enjoy puzzling about what they think the man has already depicted in the corner of his canvas and why the lady is so dressed up. Older students spend time with identification too but concentrate on debating the odder details of the location—what they can learn from the trash can, the cleaner’s tools, the sprinkler, and the undue prominence of the clock.

In the other painting, the cast of characters and event can be figured out fairly easily, but what’s going on with the male figure’s face? The missing features, red interior, and dark elements contribute to a sense of mystery. Younger people focus on the birthday, the child and its gender, what the female figure is doing, and enumerating what’s on the table. Older students will also take inventory of what’s to be seen but are likely to concentrate on the darker possibilities in the painting, triggered by the man and how he looms over the action in a slightly murky way.

As you can surmise from these summaries of what students discuss, appropriate images not only depict elements children quickly recognize, but also contain aspects that are up for deliberation—ones that provoke a range of opinions. You want to make students go beyond what is obvious to them and gain practice at deeper thinking. You want, therefore, to find images that have elements that are debatable, material to chew on so to speak. You are preparing them to become adept at probing for a variety of meanings and different levels of meaning, useful in subjects across disciplines. It’s what scientists and historians do: they make observations and then start to ruminate on the variety of conclusions that might be drawn.

We recommend starting VTS using art, but images of other sorts work as long as they follow certain guidelines, summarized here:

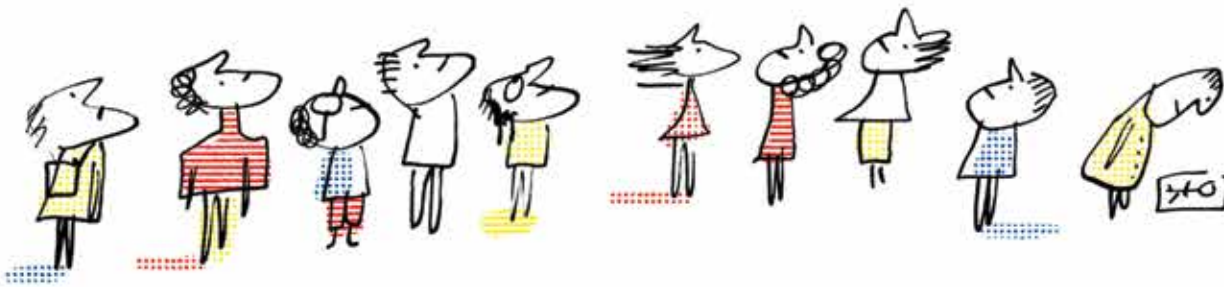
- *Choose works of art depicting subjects of interest to your students.* For young students, subjects that work well include children playing, parents and children interacting in familiar ways, and animals doing something interesting. Narrative content—stories—works for all ages; it’s the specific story and its complexity that varies according to age. The older the students, the more crucial it is to pick stories that interest them, ones that relate to their concerns and values at the present moment.
- *Use familiar imagery* given the existing knowledge of students and considering their varied life experiences as well as what’s



PALMER HAYDEN, "THE JANITOR WHO PAINTS," SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM, GIFT OF THE HARMON FOUNDATION



JOHN SINGER SARGENT, "THE BIRTHDAY PARTY"



been covered at school. The students need to recognize enough of what is presented immediately to begin talking.

- *Choose accessible story lines*—narratives with understandable meaning—thinking about the specific group of students you are teaching. What’s meaningful to preschoolers is quite different from high school students. And where and how your students live are other factors that determine what they recognize, and what they both can and want to deal with.
- *Allow for some ambiguity in the image and room for interpretation.* While you want to engage students quickly, you also want to keep them looking. This requires ideas that will take a few minutes to puzzle through, stories whose meanings will deepen with a bit of time and collaborative thinking, and subjects that allow room for multiple ideas to be valid.

In using VTS, we suggest teachers steer away from images that are dense, abstract, murky, macabre, or scary. It’s not that children cannot deal with these in some ways, but we recommend giving them images that allow them to compute meanings that add to their trove of memories in positive ways. Nudes are illogical choices too, in order to respect the values of children’s home environments, very diverse in the contemporary world. There is enough time later for the broader range of

Appropriate images not only depict elements children quickly recognize, but also contain aspects that are up for deliberation.

options our very visual world produces. The internet makes it easier than ever to find and use images, and the array to choose from is staggering.⁵

Allow a few moments of silent looking at the image chosen before beginning the discussion. Make it a task with specific directions if you need: for example, encourage students to look from top to bottom, then side to side, and to look for big details and small ones.

Pose specific questions to motivate and maintain the inquiry. Through our research and testing, Housen and I found that it only takes three specific questions to facilitate a productive discussion,

and we suggest using them just as we've worded them below. Students then have a chance to memorize them and make use of them in many different kinds of inquiries, even on their own. (You may also find the pattern of questions useful as you teach other exploratory lessons.)

- Start with: "What's going on (or what's happening) in this picture?" Ask this only once, to get the discussion started. With very young children, consider starting with: "What do you see in this picture?" Or "What do you notice?"
- Follow any comment that contains an inference (an idea that is open to interpretation, different from a straightforward observation) by asking: "What do you see that makes you say that?"
- Before each new student comments, ask: "What more can you find?" Even when you are calling on a student whose hand has been in the air, keep positing the notion that there is always more to be found. VTS is an exercise in thinking reflectively, not coming to conclusions quickly.

VTS isn't about finding right answers; it's about observing and thinking about what one sees.



Many teachers talk about the impact of the questions, and most argue in favor of memorizing them. Rachel Zender teaches sixth grade in Spokane, Washington, and she makes that case well:

The teacher's understanding and knowing the questions is essential. When they haven't been memorized, and the teacher seems to be trying to remember what's next, the discussions can feel forced and unnatural for the kids. Once I really had them down, I always knew what to do next, and I was free to be more present, and the kids could see that.⁶

Asking these questions activates the discussion, but to fully nurture learning, you need to facilitate the discussion that follows. The guidelines below are the result of many years of studying what makes learning happen, a combination of action on the part of the student and support from the teacher.

- Listen carefully to catch all a student says. If you don't quite grasp it at first, ask him or her to repeat it. If you still don't understand, ask for help: "Can you add more words to help us understand?" If you can't find what the student sees, again ask for help: "Can you show us what you're seeing?" If students struggle for language (it can happen with very young children and those for whom English is not their primary language, among others), let them come to the image and point.
- Point to all observations as students comment. This is a "visual paraphrase" that says you're following what they mention. Point again to what's been mentioned as you rephrase their ideas.
- Paraphrase each comment, no matter how short, taking a moment to reflect if you need a bit of time to find the words to do so. Show you understand the student's meaning as you respond.
- Link related comments whether or not students agree or disagree or build on one another's ideas.
- It is important to remain neutral, treating everyone and each comment in the same fair and open way. VTS isn't about finding right answers; it's about observing and thinking about what one sees as part of an open-ended discovery.

Conclude by thanking students for their participation. Tell them what you particularly enjoyed. Suggest they share other ideas with someone sitting next to them if they didn't get a chance to talk. Or let them write short statements about what they think is going on in an image. You can use these to help assess their writing ability—usually aided if a discussion precedes writing—as well as changes in their thinking.

No "Right" Answer

Switching from conventional teaching modes to one as different as VTS can create moments of discomfort, but most teachers enjoy this approach, especially watching all students participate with enthusiasm. And, again, even during the phase where teachers are learning the craft of rephrasing and linking students' comments, our data, in the form of observations and teacher insights, show that all students grow in their ability to express themselves.

Students, too, accustomed as most are to discussions that are seeking correct responses, may be troubled at first by the openness of VTS, where many answers are correct and none are wrong, as long as they are backed up with evidence. Since art is intentionally ambiguous and open to debate, it's a perfect arena in which to learn to explore without the pressure of finding the "right" answer.

VTS has been used at every grade level, from preschools to universities, including in medical education. The strategy remains as you just read it described above; what changes as students get older is the art—and increasingly, the use of images of other sorts, from photojournalism to historical and scientific—as well as your expectations of what will happen. Preschoolers talk about what they see and what interests them, as do high school students, though their interests are, logically enough, quite different.

Tracy McClure has taught sixth-graders in Petaluma, California, for years. She took to VTS quickly when she first started using the approach 10 years ago. A specialist in English language arts and writing, she thought that VTS applied to poetry might engage her students more than other methods she'd tried. After several

years of using VTS with images and also adapting it for teaching poetry, her students recognized just how much it benefited them. In response to the question “How do you learn best?” here are two typical answers from her students:

First student: “I learn the best when I work in a group. I can really learn because I get more than one interpretation about something. Hearing my peers’ interpretation of the subject might give me a new way of seeing or of solving something. I can’t learn as much working alone or in pairs because I can’t hear as many ways of thinking.”

Second student: “When I learn just about anything, I always like to hear people’s ideas first and then I add on to them. I am the kind of person who has to talk through things in order to learn them. Another thing that I do when I learn is, when I’m talking through it, I also get a picture in my head of what is going on in whatever I am learning at the time.”

These insights resonate in the work of many learning theorists. For example, Lev Vygotsky, a student of early childhood behavior, documented many young children talking their way through tasks as they figured out what they were supposed to do. As soon as language is available to them, he points out, children begin talking themselves into learning what they come to know.

It’s clear that this “talking through” hasn’t stopped working for the second student quoted above—and she’s hardly alone. Meaning-making is the task to be talked through in the case of VTS, and it’s a key aspect of cognition: VTS gives students the chance to engage their eye-mind connections, use their growing language ability to probe the visual complexities (and to do so with assists from peers), and in effect use art to help them learn to think. By way of extended discussions, children learn more and more about how oral language and communication work as well.⁷

Within a few years of testing VTS, our school data revealed that a set of roughly 8–10 hourlong discussions conducted in a sequence over several months had a measurable impact on students:

- They made more observations, which became more detailed and focused over time.
- They drew more inferences from these observations.
- They backed up increasing numbers of opinions with evidence.
- They speculated among multiple possible interpretations.
- They elaborated on early ideas and often revised their notions upon reflection.

In recent years, the need for fluency with these skills has increased in importance as schools prioritize problem solving. Teachers using VTS attest to witnessing the above changes, particularly in the first three categories, after only 8–10 discussions. Teachers also report they are likely to see these behaviors employed in other lessons, too, where observing, inferring, and/or providing evidence are needed. They often show up in students’ writing as well.

Students steadily develop confidence in their own voices and in the validity of their opinions.

Another finding is the often-cited impact of discussions on social behavior. VTS discussions engage all students, including those usually reluctant to speak up. Discussions have a civility sometimes missing in other classroom exchanges, and this carries over to other collaborations, whether in preschool or in higher grades. Students steadily develop confidence in their own voices and in the validity of their opinions. The importance of such social and emotional growth has increased in recent years as schools have assumed more responsibility for developing all aspects of student potential, not just academic achievement.

Although schools today tend to turn art-making over to the few specialists left to visit classrooms where it is often proudly displayed, in the past, art played a more central role in people’s lives. It was more than just décor, for it often embodied and conveyed deeply felt matters—ideas and information that helped people know who they were and from whence they came.

Art objects connected them to their gods, marked the passage of time, honored those who came before them, and manifested essential truths. Much art of the past was sacred, and those works that tend to live on do so only because generation after generation recognizes the inherent value of art in aiding our understanding of the human condition. VTS allows teachers to bring this heritage into the lives of all children and to do it while respecting the many demands on their time. □

Endnotes

1. See “Lascaux Cave Paintings: Discover, Layout, Meaning, Photographs of Prehistoric Animal Pictures,” www.visual-arts-cork.com/prehistoric/lascaux-cave-paintings.htm.
2. R. Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).
3. B. Hart and T. R. Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes, 1995).
4. D. Zimmerman, interview with author, 2017.
5. For VTS training online and access to images for all grade levels, see <https://watershed-1.herokuapp.com>. For images that deal with current events and history, see Michael Gonchar, “40 Intriguing Photos to Make Students Think,” *New York Times*, September 22, 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/learning/40-intriguing-photos-to-make-students-think.html.
6. R. Zender, interview with author, 2012.
7. L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind and Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1978).



Art and Healing in Puerto Rico

Arte y Sanación en Puerto Rico

Last May, the AFT's executive council held its spring meeting in Puerto Rico. It was nearly eight months after Hurricane Maria had devastated the island. In the wake of the storm, the AFT joined in numerous recovery efforts. Among the most notable was Operation Agua, which the AFT launched to ensure families could have access to safe drinking water. Through this effort, the AFT raised more than \$2 million to distribute more than 100,000 filters to residents and public schools all across the island. The AFT also sent professional staff to support the Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico (AMPR), whose members were severely impacted by the storm. Just weeks before Maria hit the island, AMPR had voted to affiliate with the AFT.

To show solidarity with the local and its members, the executive council held its meeting in San Juan. Members of the council met with teachers and students and observed the rebuilding efforts. They also toured the Escuela Especializada Central de Artes Visuales in San Juan. The school, which enrolls students in grades 7–12, boasts a thriving visual arts program. Members of the council toured La Central (as the school is commonly known) to see firsthand the damage the historic building had suffered. But a highlight of the visit was seeing the students' beautiful works of art. On the following pages, we show some of these pieces and hear from veteran teacher Eluciano Vega González. For 23 years, Vega has taught art at the school. Here he reflects on its importance in students' lives.

—Editors

BY ELUCIANO VEGA GONZÁLEZ

Art education in this school is integrated into other subjects, which means there are connections with the academic classes. For example, students use mathematics in determining the proportions of works of art and in making the frames for their pieces. Also, they integrate history into art. They need to know the history of the art they're making. What is the artistic tradition, the trajectory? Is it European, American, South American, Central American, or Caribbean? And art classes are connected to Spanish language classes, since students write about what they create.

Of course, there is an emotional side to art. It helps students to channel emotions. For example, in a course on fresco paintings, they select a topic that reflects who they are, what they feel, what they suffer, and what they experience in their surroundings. Some students become interested in studying psychology through art. We have students who are very vulnerable to the difficult situation on the island and use art to project and reflect the feelings they have—not only their feelings but the feelings of their peers, because after what happened with Maria, some left.

Although I would love my students to become great artists, I think the greatest lesson I can teach them is to be great human beings. If art can help students to be good neighbors and great human beings, that would make me happy, because that lesson will then be with them their whole lives.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY AFT STAFF

Arte y Sanación en Puerto Rico

Art and Healing in Puerto Rico



En el pasado mes de mayo, el consejo ejecutivo de AFT llevó a cabo su reunión de primavera en Puerto Rico. Habían pasado casi ocho meses desde que el huracán María había devastado la isla. A raíz de la tormenta, la AFT se unió a numerosos esfuerzos de recuperación. Entre los más notables se encuentra la Operación Agua, que la AFT lanzó para garantizar que las familias puedan tener acceso a agua potable. A través de este esfuerzo, la AFT recaudó más de \$2 millones para distribuir más de 100,000 filtros a los residentes y escuelas públicas a través de toda la isla. La AFT también envió personal profesional para apoyar a la Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico (AMPR), cuyos miembros se vieron gravemente impactados por la tormenta. Apenas unas semanas antes de que María azotara la isla, la AMPR había votado para afiliarse a la AFT.

Para mostrar solidaridad con el sindicato local y sus miembros, el consejo ejecutivo celebró su reunión en San Juan. Los miembros del consejo se reunieron con los maestros y estudiantes y observaron los esfuerzos de reconstrucción. También recorrieron la Escuela Especializada Central de Artes Visuales en San Juan. La escuela, que inscribe estudiantes del 7mo. al 12vo. grado, cuenta con un próspero programa de artes visuales. Los miembros del consejo visitaron La Central (como se le conoce comúnmente) para ver de primera mano el daño que había sufrido el edificio histórico. Pero lo más destacado de la visita fue ver las hermosas obras de arte de los estudiantes. En las siguientes páginas, mostramos algunas de estas piezas y escuchamos a un maestro veterano Eluciano Vega González. Durante 23 años, Vega ha enseñado arte en la escuela. He aquí su reflexión sobre su importancia en las vidas de los estudiantes.

—Editores

POR ELUCIANO VEGA GONZÁLEZ

La educación artística en esta escuela está integrada en otras asignaturas, lo que significa que hay conexiones con las clases académicas. Por ejemplo, los estudiantes usan las matemáticas para determinar las proporciones de las obras de arte y para hacer los marcos para sus piezas. Además, integran la historia en el arte. Necesitan conocer la historia del arte que están haciendo. ¿Cuál es la tradición artística, la trayectoria? ¿Es europea, estadounidense, sudamericana, centroamericana, o caribeña? Y las clases de arte están conectadas con las clases de español, ya que los estudiantes escriben sobre lo que crean.

Por supuesto, hay un lado emocional al arte. Ayuda a los estudiantes a canalizar emociones. Por ejemplo, en un curso sobre pinturas al fresco, ellos seleccionan un tema que refleja quienes son, lo que sienten, lo que sufren y lo que ellos experimentan en su entorno. Algunos estudiantes se interesan en estudiar psicología a través del arte. Tenemos estudiantes que son muy vulnerables a la difícil situación de la isla y luego utilizan el arte para proyectar y reflejar los sentimientos que tienen—no solo sus sentimientos sino los de sus compañeros, porque después de lo que pasó con María, algunos se fueron.

Aunque me encantaría que mis estudiantes se conviertan en grandes artistas, pienso que la mejor lección que puedo enseñarles es ser grandes seres humanos. Si el arte puede ayudar a los estudiantes a ser un buen prójimo y grandes seres humanos, eso me haría feliz, porque esa lección los acompañará toda la vida.



The Fight for Dyett

How a Community in Chicago Saved Its Public School



▲ Protesters hold a vigil following a silent march to President Obama’s Chicago home during the 2015 Dyett hunger strike.

▶ AFT President Randi Weingarten, right, stands with hunger striker Irene Robinson.



BY EVE L. EWING

For an August day in Chicago, the weather is unseasonably cool, and many of the people sitting in the park have blankets draped over their laps or around their shoulders. In many ways, this looks like any family gathering in Washington Park—older faces and younger faces in a circle of fabric lawn chairs and coolers, chatting amiably. But rather than pop, picnic food, or snacks, many of the coolers are filled with infused water or high-nutrient juices. Thermoses of hot broth are propped against a tree. And there are people here you wouldn’t see at a family picnic: visitors from across the city, reporters and photographers from across the country. Worried nurses flit from person to person. No music is playing. Sometimes folks laugh and joke cheerfully; other times they look off into space, exhausted.

Eve L. Ewing is an assistant professor at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration. A former middle school teacher in Chicago Public Schools, she is a poet, an essayist, and the writer of the Ironheart series for Marvel Comics. This article is an excerpt from her new book, Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago’s South Side, published by the University of Chicago Press. Copyright 2018, the University of Chicago. All rights reserved.

Behind it all, a tremendous black building looms, its windows dark. And that is the reason these people are here—not for any family reunion or summer gathering, but in the name of this shuttered building, Walter H. Dyett High School. They are not picnickers, they are hunger strikers. And they are putting their lives on the line in hopes of seeing their vision for this school become reality.

Why do people fight for schools like this? While the Dyett hunger strike would rise to public prominence as one of the most visible examples of community members fighting to save a school, it is hardly the only one. Across the country, school stakeholders who are culturally and geographically very different have waged notably similar battles to get their schools off district chopping blocks.

In Detroit in 2017, hundreds of parents and community members rallied in front of the state of Michigan’s offices to protest the closing of schools that others referred to as “consistently failing” and “the worst of the worst.”¹ In Shreveport, Louisiana, in 2011, parents held meetings and circulated a petition to save Blanchard Elementary, which the district called “small,” “lacking,” and “old.”² In Austin, Texas, in 2016, parents organized high turnouts at community meetings and picketed to fight the district’s closure of 10

Across the country, school stakeholders have waged notably similar battles to get their schools off district chopping blocks.

schools it said were in poor physical condition and under-enrolled.³ In Dyett's case, the media declared that "by just about any definition, [the school] has failed."⁴

To outside observers, concerned neighbors and friends, and informed citizens reading about education issues in the news or seeing these protests on television, it may be hard to reconcile these characterizations. If the schools are *small, the worst, lacking*, and so on, why is anyone fighting for them? This question may be amplified by the image of public schools we see and hear in the media, from the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* to the movie *Dangerous Minds*. As someone who attended public schools and later taught in one, I can't count how many times a stranger remarked to me in casual conversation that I was an "angel" or a "saint" because public schools were "just so bad," with no clear reasoning about why or in what way.

This excerpt, which is drawn from my book *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side*, tells the story of one group of people fighting to keep a school open and, moreover, to see it reflect their vision for their community and their children's education. We see that this community's choice to resist a school's being characterized as "failing" is in fact about much more than the school itself: it is about citizenship and participation, about justice and injustice, and about resisting people in power who want to transform a community at the expense of the people who live there.

The Dyett Tradition

So much of black life in Chicago happens in Washington Park that if you are African American, even if you are from the West Side or (like

me) the North Side, it is hard not to find yourself there at least once each summer. The African Festival of the Arts, the Bud Billiken Parade, and family barbecues all find a home in the massive park. Sitting at the southern edge of Bronzeville, it covers 367 acres landscaped by Frederick Law Olmsted, the architect most famous for his design of New York City's Central Park. At the northern end of the park, facing 51st Street, a low building of black glass looks out over a broad expanse of grass.

In summer 2015, the building is empty, but the flag still flies above it. The sign still says "Welcome to Walter H. Dyett High School" in black against a yellow background, bright against the backdrop of the dark building and Chicago's more-often-than-not gray weather. But no doors are open. No teenagers gather to talk or to run, to flirt or gossip or tease, to play football or scramble for forgotten homework or do the things teenagers do. Walter H. Dyett High School is closed.

Not many schools are named after teachers, so it is notable that this building is as much a living monument to Walter H. Dyett as it is an educational institution. It is also notable that this man,

arguably the most renowned and respected educator ever to emerge from Bronzeville—a community famous for its musical venues and figures—was a bandleader and music teacher.

Walter Henri Dyett was born in 1901 in Saint Joseph, Missouri. His mother was a pianist and soprano vocalist, and his father was a pastor in the AME church. Dyett began his musical life as a violinist after his family moved to California; as a student at Pasadena High School, he became concertmaster of the orchestra and also played clarinet, bassoon, and drums.

After graduating in 1917, he attended the University of California at Berkeley, where he was first violinist in the school's symphony orchestra while he completed his premed studies. In 1921, Dyett received a scholarship to the Illinois School of Medicine and moved back to Chicago to pursue his studies. However, his mother and sister, already living there, needed financial help, and he took on work as a musician to support his family. In a curriculum vitae dating from 1960, Dyett described the early days of this work: "One year violinist in Erskine Tate's Vendome Theatre Orchestra playing the silent pictures and stage presentations along with Louis Armstrong and other now internationally known musicians. Transferred to orchestra leader in the Pickford Theatre—one of the Vendome chain—and remained until talking pictures came in and orchestras went out."

He next became youth music director at a church, then a private teacher of violin and music theory. Finally, in 1931, Dyett began the work for which he would become beloved: he became a music teacher at Phillips High School in Bronzeville. When Phillips was relocated in 1936 and renamed DuSable High School (after the city's founder, the Haitian Jean Baptiste Point du Sable), Dyett went along to the new school.

Tribute concerts, memorials, and articles about Dyett often cite his influence on the Bronzeville musical legends who were his students, such as Von Freeman and Nat King Cole. But while these figures loom large in history, they were far outnumbered by



Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side, by Eve L. Ewing, is published by the University of Chicago Press, which is offering *American Educator* readers a 20 percent discount off the purchase price of the book through December 31, 2019. To order, visit www.press.uchicago.edu or call 800-621-2736 and use promo code AD1791.

Researchers have documented that the choice model often leaves black families at a disadvantage.

the thousands of average Bronzeville teenagers who discovered a love of music through his schoolwide concerts and community initiatives during his 38 years as a teacher.

“Choice” and Change

In 2000, Dyett Middle School faced a major upheaval. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) introduced plans to convert Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. High School, a little more than a mile away, into a college preparatory school, with a selective admissions system based on test scores and grades rather than open enrollment. King would receive a multimillion-dollar renovation, and students from all over the city would be able to attend—if they could meet the stringent admissions requirements. The move was part of CPS’s creation of a suite of “selective enrollment” schools designed to attract the top academic (and top socioeconomic) tier of the city’s high school students through a rigorous curriculum and high-end facilities. The transition also meant that if their test scores did not make them eligible to attend the new, selective King, students in the area would need a new place to go—so Dyett would be changed from a middle school to a high school.

Neighborhood residents were not happy with this plan. One parent of a King student expressed frustration that the \$20 million to be invested in the school’s renovation was nowhere to be found when the school’s enrollment was based on neighborhood attendance boundaries. Another community member lamented that young people in the area would be “shipped out of their neighborhood in order to turn King into a magnet school,” suggesting that this ostensibly public school would no longer be public at all.

The development of selective enrollment schools was just one piece of what would, over the following decade, become an expansion of “choice” within CPS. No longer would students necessarily attend the schools in their immediate areas, as they had done for generations. Instead, new schools appeared or were converted across the South Side, with varying purposes and admissions policies: several charter schools, a military academy, a technology school, an international school, and others now dotted the landscape. This evolution of the district into a “portfolio”⁵ of options parents are expected to choose among was part of a nationwide trend that deemphasized local or community-based schools in favor of thinking of each city as a marketplace of options.

While choosing the best option from a menu of possibilities is appealing in theory, researchers have documented that in practice the choice model often leaves black families at a disadvantage. Black parents’ ability to truly choose may be hindered by limited access to transportation, information, and time, leaving them on the losing end of a supposedly fair marketplace.⁶ Further, this shift in Chicago occurred in tandem with a broader conversation about a city in flux—a city that, in order to claim a place as a “world class”



Protesters at a Chicago budget town hall occupy the stage to ensure their voices are heard.

urban center, was dead set on transforming its neighborhoods to make them more attractive to white residents at the expense of a displaced black populace.⁷

Meanwhile, the school “right over there” languished. While enrollment at Dyett High School varied over the decade, its student numbers eventually began to decline. By 2011, only 19 percent of the students within Dyett’s attendance area were enrolled in the school.⁸ Most families in the neighborhood were no longer choosing Dyett, opt-

ing to send their children elsewhere.

On November 30, 2011, parents of Dyett students received a letter from CPS CEO Jean-Claude Brizard. It stated that the school was not meeting students’ needs and that a grade would be phased out each year, with the closure of the school completed by the 2014–2015 school year (when only seniors would remain).⁹

Brizard told the local news media he would prefer to send new teachers and resources to Dyett and other schools proposed for phaseout rather than shutting them down. But he felt that Dyett was beyond such measures and that sending more resources would be pointless. As it turned out, at least one group was dissatisfied with Brizard’s characterizing Dyett as an unsalvageable failure. And they were ready to take him on, using a variety of tactics.

The phaseout nature of the plan meant there was a window of a few years for teachers, students, parents, and community members to organize in hopes of reversing the school board’s decision. In 2012, they staged sit-ins and several were arrested for peaceably refusing to leave City Hall. Thirty-six students filed a federal civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department of Education alleging that closing Dyett reflected racially discriminatory practices. In 2013, several groups came together and formed the Coalition to Revitalize Dyett, a partnership of community organizers, representatives from the Chicago Teachers Union and Teachers for Social Justice, professors from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and organizational partners such as the DuSable Museum of African American History and the Chicago Botanic Gardens. The coalition developed a plan to keep Dyett open, which it submitted unsolicited to new CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett (Brizard was gone by then, after only 17 months in the position). They proposed that Dyett be a high school focused on “global leadership and green technology,” with a focus on environmental sustainability, social justice, and 21st-century careers, to be known as Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High School.¹⁰

There was reason to believe the hunger strike could be effective: direct historical precedent.

This proposal was an extension of a project already in the works before news of Dyett's phaseout was announced: a plan for a "Bronzeville Global Achievers Village" that would align Dyett with local elementary schools. The "village" plan was based on community outreach to local parents over the course of 18 months and was intended to create a sense of stability and solidarity in a part of the city rocked by years of school closures.¹¹

For Dyett's supporters, the official assessment of the school as a failure was unacceptable, the latest manifestation of a long-running pattern of abandonment and disregard. "The Board's policy of closing one school after another in this hot real estate market has disrupted the lives of countless African American children and set back their educational opportunities. Some of us at Dyett and [Florence B.] Price [Elementary School] have been moved two or more times," wrote the students in their Title VI civil rights complaint.

On September 4, 2015, the coalition formally announced the hunger strike while standing in the broad green space in front of Dyett. News cameras and reporters gathered around as Jitu Brown, the national director for the Journey for Justice Alliance, began to speak. On that day, several members of the coalition, along with activists and community allies, were beginning a monumental undertaking. They vowed not to eat until the mayor agreed to move forward with the Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High School.¹²

There was reason to believe the hunger strike could be effective: direct historical precedent. In 2001, 14 parents and community members in Little Village, a Mexican American neighborhood north and west of Dyett, held a 19-day hunger strike after CPS promised a new building to relieve overcrowding in the neighborhood school, then delayed the project. The strikers camped out in tents on the land sited for the school, which they called Camp Cesar Chavez. Paul Vallas, CEO at the time, refused to meet with them or negotiate or respond to what he called blackmail. "I'm not going to locate it on a site because people are threatening not to eat. You could have one of these [protests] a week," he said. When Vallas left Chicago and was replaced as CEO by Arne Duncan, Duncan declared that he had "a hell of a lot of respect for [the protesters]" and agreed to move forward with the new school.

Could the same story unfold in Bronzeville? Conceding to the board, stepping back and letting them renege on their word or reroute the process they had already established, or create a whole new process, would be like conceding that their version of the world had merit. In their world, Dyett was a failure. Nothing worth saving. A disposable school serving disposable people, to be moved around in whatever ways were convenient at the moment. This moment was a referendum on the history, legacy, and future of Bronzeville and on the right to black educational self-determination.

"All of Us Wanted Dyett"

Like many other aspects of CPS's bureaucratic functioning, attending a board of education meeting is theoretically very easy and practically not easy at all. Meetings are open to the public, but they

always take place at 10:30 on Wednesday morning—an awkward time for working parents or teachers. You have to sign up in advance, and the online registration notoriously fills up and closes within minutes of opening. Many days before the August 26 meeting that Dyett supporters planned to attend to make their case to the district, I had set my alarm early so I could get my name on the register the second it opened. I thought back to several weeks before, when this meeting was supposed to be the day the board would make a final determination on Dyett. Now things seemed no closer to a resolution. When I arrived at the meeting, the chambers were already full, and I had to sit in an overflow room watching the proceedings on closed-circuit television. When it was time for public comment, Bronzeville resident and hunger striker Jeanette Taylor-Ramann took the podium and spoke, despite appearing tired and physically weak. She was wrapped in a blanket. "The only mistake I ever made was being born black," she said to the board.

Others took the podium, talking about other issues unrelated to Dyett, and each speaker shed light on another way the city was struggling. The board proceedings mandate extremely strict time limits, with a large red digital countdown clock, and as people stepped to the microphone asking for care and attention toward things extremely important to them, each was met by dispassionate stares from the people on the dais. It was a depressing display, like some feudal society, with subjects asking for mercy from a panel of powerful lords. A mother told the board how her homeless children were denied the transportation benefits they were supposed to receive from the district and how she had to spend food money to get them to school on public transit. The treasurer of the Chicago



A rally and sit-in at Chicago City Hall results in 16 arrests. ▲

Teachers Union spoke of how proposed special education cuts would hurt students with disabilities; when she began to cry, she was removed by security. A teenage girl said that her college and career counselor was being laid off and that she didn't know how she would get to college; she was also removed by security.

Suddenly, a member of the coalition burst into the overflow room. "Is anyone here a doctor? Jeanette just fainted." Everyone looked up at him wide-eyed, and he whirled away. I got up and went to the exit, where a security guard stood. "Yes? There's no room in the chambers," the guard said, moving between me and the door. I peered around him, craning my neck to see Jeanette Taylor-Ramann being carried out on a stretcher. The meeting continued uninterrupted.

Whether you're in Detroit or Austin or Louisiana or Chicago, you want to feel that your school is your school.

Eight days later, CPS announced that Dyett would be reopened.

Dyett was to become an open-enrollment arts high school, featuring an “innovation technology lab.” Despite the talk about “innovation,” the coalition’s plan would not be used and was not acknowledged or referred to in any way in the press release. In fact, none of the proposals or any aspect of the RFP was mentioned in the press release.¹³ It was as if it had never happened.

“They have won,” said Congressman Bobby Rush, speaking of the hunger strikers. No coalition members were in the room to hear him, however. They were not admitted to the chambers where the press conference took place. They sat outside.

The next day, Jitu Brown told Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now!* that the hunger strike would continue:

We do not see this as a victory. This is not a victory for the children in Bronzeville. ... I got a call from CPS CEO Forrest Claypool 15 minutes before the press conference, that we were locked out of by CPS, and he told me—I asked him, “Well, where is the room for negotiation?” And he said, “Well, we’re moving forward.” So my message to him today is: So are we. We’re moving forward. ... This is not something that we take lightly. These are our children. These are our communities. We have to live with CPS reforms after the people that

implement them get promoted to some other job. So we will determine the type of education that our children receive in Bronzeville.¹⁴

Why do people fight for schools like Dyett? Why did the coalition continue to fight even after those in power assured them of their own victory? Because it was never just about Dyett. A fight for a school is never just about a school. A school means the potential for stability in an unstable world, the potential for agency in the face of powerlessness, the enactment of one’s own dreams and visions for one’s

own children. Because whether you’re in Detroit or Austin or Louisiana or Chicago, you want to feel that your school is your school. That you have some say in the matter, that your voice can make a difference. You want to feel that the rules are fair, not that you’re playing a shell game. You want to feel like a citizen. So you fight.

The Dyett hunger strike ended on September 20, 2015, after 34 days and two hospitalizations. At a press conference, hunger striker Monique Redeaux-Smith addressed the crowd:

While we cannot yet claim complete victory, we do understand that our efforts so far have been victorious in a number of ways. ... Through community resistance, [Dyett] was slated to be reopened in 2016–17. And even though there was a request for proposals, we know that the plan for that space was to become another privatized school within Bronzeville. But again, with community resistance and this hunger strike, we pushed CPS and the mayor to commit to reopening Dyett as a public, open-enrollment neighborhood school. And that is a victory.¹⁵

The members of the coalition did not see their plan for Dyett come to fruition. But they garnered national attention for a struggle that, years earlier, had implicitly been declared dead. “There are some schools so far gone that you cannot save them,” Brizard had said, declaring that the building was devoid of hope. Those who fought for Dyett understood that what was on paper a question of numbers actually reflected the belief that their lives, their children’s lives, and their hopes did not matter. The end came only when it became apparent how deep that disregard really was, and the fight became a matter of life or death in a terrifyingly immediate way.

Today, the lights are back on at the huge black building in Washington Park. Walter H. Dyett High School for the Arts boasts almost \$15 million in new investments, including facilities for dance, textile design, and music.¹⁶ And starting in sophomore year, all students are required to take music. When the school opened for its first (new) day in 2016, the building greeted a new freshman class of 150 students, above the target of 125. And 85 percent of them were from the area immediately surrounding the school. When asked what she thought of the new Dyett, one of the new students said, “We value our education more because of what people sacrificed.”¹⁷

I have looked through a lot of old photographs of Walter Henri Dyett. Dyett served in the military, and I have seen his portraits in uniform. I have seen photos of him in childhood. I have seen photographs of him leading distinguished musicians arrayed in perfect rows, in pristine black-and-white formal wear. I have seen him at the front of his classroom, orchestrating music from the students known as “the Captain’s kids,” some of whom lied about their addresses to study under him. But my favorite photograph shows Dyett standing in Washington Park. It’s spring, and several young women are gathered for a baton-twirling training camp, learning to be majorettes. My own grandmother, who was born in Mississippi and migrated north in 1943, was a baton twirler, and I always envied the skill. In the photo, Dyett stands amid the trees and seems unaware of the camera. He’s demonstrating how to twirl the baton as the girls watch intently, hands on their hips. The girls wear shorts, and Dyett’s sleeves are rolled up. When I look at the photo, I think of these regular days as an educator, the moments that don’t make headlines but that make all the hard work feel worth it. The moments of intense



▲ Hunger striker Jitu Brown at a Labor Day rally.



▲ Walter Henri Dyett in Washington Park, June 1940.

The fight for Dyett was about honoring the everyday moments that make a school a place of care, a home, a site of history.

focus and commitment where trying to help someone understand seems like the most important thing in the world, deserving all your energy. In this photo, I see Dyett not as a historical luminary, the person whose name ends up over the door of a building, but as an ordinary person trying to do what he can for the young people of Bronzeville. I see a warm day in Washington Park, with people convened to be together but also to pursue something they think is vital for their lives.

And this, in the end, is what the fight for Dyett was about. It was about honoring the everyday moments that make a school a place of care, a home, a site of history. It was about saying *this is not a failed school, and we are not a failed people. We know our history. We will prevail. You will not kill us.* □

Endnotes

1. H. Fournier, "Give Our District a Chance": Rally Fights DPS Closings," *Detroit News*, February 17, 2017.
2. A. Burris, "Caddo Proposes Building Three, Closing Six Schools," *Shreveport Times*, December 18, 2014.
3. A. Inns, "Some AISD Schools May Shut Down due to Conditions, Enrollment," KXAN, December 1, 2016.
4. S. Simon and J. Kelleher, "Should This School Be Saved? The Fight Over Chicago's Dyett High," *Chicago Tribune*, November 11, 2012.
5. "Portfolio" mirrors "CEO" as an example of the language of business, corporations, and

markets creeping into public education.

6. M. Pattillo, "Everyday Politics of School Choice in the Black Community," *Du Bois Review* 12, no. 1 (2015): 41–71. See also A. Dixon, "Whose Choice? A Critical Race Perspective on Charter Schools," in *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans*, ed. by Cedric Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011): 130–151.
7. P. Lipman and N. Haines, "From Accountability to Privatization and African American Exclusion: Chicago's Renaissance 2010," *Educational Policy* 21, no. 3 (2007): 471–502.
8. S. Karp, "Neighborhood High Schools Losing Students," *Catalyst Chicago*, December 20, 2011.
9. CBS Chicago, "Brizard: Some Schools Are Too 'Far Gone' to Save," December 1, 2011.
10. E. Fortino, "UIC Education Experts: Chicago Should Move to an Elected School Board," *Progress Illinois*, February 19, 2015.
11. D. Stone, "Chicago City Hall Sit-In Day Two: Speakers Outlined Demands of Sit-In as the Famous Fifth Floor of Chicago's City Hall Echoed with the Chants, Prayers, Songs and Spirit of the Civil Rights and Freedom Ride Eras," *Substance News*, January 5, 2012, www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=2968.
12. This prompts an important question. Is this the school plan that most Bronzeville residents would support? The coalition represented several community voices and long-term engagement, but does that mean a majority of people within the attendance area would be in favor of the plan? This question highlights a fundamental problem with the governance structure of Chicago schools—there is no real way of knowing, because there are virtually no opportunities for most people to express a democratic preference for one proposal or another. For instance, we might imagine a referendum vote held in the ward—but the ward, a city legislative designation, doesn't map precisely onto school attendance boundaries. Currently, CPS's primary methods for soliciting broad community feedback are board meetings and public hearings, neither of which allows a binding or comprehensive base of perspectives in the way that a vote does. But did most parents in the attendance boundary want this proposal? Or know about it? We can't say, and that is symptomatic of a much larger issue.

(Continued on page 40)

The Digital Dilemma

Making Technology a Tool for Student Success—Not a Distraction



BY ANA HOMAYOUN

The high school's information technology (IT) specialist looked at me with a mixture of amusement and bewilderment. He had become the person in charge of managing IT at a local high school that had recently decided to implement a one-to-one tablet program.

His most recent task was to refurbish the 1,500 or so tablets that had been turned in after the first year. As anyone working with high school students can attest, there is normally significant wear and tear on any item after a full year's use.

"What was the most surprising thing you found when you went through all the tablets?" I asked, expecting that most of the time was spent fixing broken screens and replacing missing covers.

"Well," he said slowly, "one thing that surprised me was that some of the students, and I went back and figured out they were mostly freshman boys, had tablet screens completely covered with documents. It was as if they just saved everything to the home screen of their tablet for *the entire year*."

In other words, these students had never learned or appreciated the simple genius of digital folders.

He went on to describe the overall physical condition of these tablets—they were also, unsurprisingly, some-

what of a mess. It didn't take long for me to realize the scope of this newfound problem: for years, I dealt with students' crumpled papers, usually discovered at the bottom of backpacks or spilling out of binders. Now, those crumpled papers were digital, quietly hidden within the confines of a sleek tablet that itself might be stuffed at the bottom of a backpack.

The lack of physical signs of disorganization was one reason many teachers and administrators were unaware of the root cause of the problem.

Over time, I realized that although they went to great lengths to make sure students knew how to use programs to help with note taking and information retention, such as Notability and Microsoft OneNote, they had done nothing to help students come up with strategies for organizing files and managing workflow. They may have assumed students would figure these things out on their own, and in some cases, students did. In many cases, though, students did not—and often, they didn't understand exactly why they felt so overwhelmed.

The school also had not provided clear guidelines for faculty on how and where to announce assignments and exams, and how to distribute and collect assignments and essays. As a result, students were juggling standards and expectations

Ana Homayoun is an educator, school consultant, and author of three books, most recently *Social Media Wellness: Helping Tweens and Teens Thrive in an Unbalanced Digital World* (Corwin, 2017), from which this article is excerpted with permission. Learn more about her work at www.anahomayoun.com or follow her on Twitter @anahomayoun.

from six or seven different teachers. Some teachers preferred Google Docs, others used Dropbox or Box to manage file sharing, and still others used apps that are now unavailable. The new standards around tablet use created an entirely new language, but in many cases, students were left without a dictionary.

The New Language of Technology in Schools

Just as social media created a new language that causes a rift in understanding between many adults and adolescents, so too has the use of technology in classrooms. As an educational consultant, I spend much of my time helping young people harness the power of technology to improve their organization and time-management skills. In my book *Social Media Wellness: Helping Tweens and Teens Thrive in an Unbalanced Digital World*, from which this article is drawn, I write about the time I presented an in-service workshop to middle school teachers and administrators. The teachers were incredibly engaged and forthcoming, and they truly believed technology had made their lives—as well as the lives of their students—much easier. I casually asked one teacher about how he communicates homework to students and how students were asked to turn in their assignments. As he shared his method, another teacher from the other side of the room blurted out, “Wow—I do it completely differently!” Within each department, many teachers had similar strategies for managing workflow, but across the school, there was no consistent strategy for sharing information or for distributing and collecting assignments.

I then shared results from a survey given to their students just a few weeks prior. Over half the students said it took them at least 30 minutes every day to *figure out* their assignments. After the school instituted an online learning management system, many teachers no longer announced assignments in class, believing they were saving valuable time by telling students to check the school’s online portal. In reality, students would attempt to navigate said portal from home and were at times faced with spotty Wi-Fi connections, glitches with the por-



tal, or homework assignments that hadn’t been updated. Even when things went smoothly, students were easily distracted from recording homework simply by being online. At the same time, some teachers used the online portal diligently, whereas others would forget to post altogether but figured that mentioning an assignment out loud at the end of class was sufficient.

This school, like many of the schools I visit that have adopted tablet or computer programs, also stopped giving students written planners. Eliminating written planners provided a substantial cost savings, but administrators hadn’t tried using online task or homework management options. If they had, they might have realized that many of the online options don’t help students who want to plan out their entire week in advance (including appointments, extracurricular activities, sports practices, and family obligations).

When students go online to figure out a homework assignment, they are inevitably tempted by the internet’s endless possibilities.

My students repeatedly told me how much they benefited from keeping their tasks and schedule all in one place. Writing everything down offline encouraged compartmentalization and allowed them to identify tasks that needed to be focused on individually. When students go online to figure out a homework assignment, they are inevitably tempted by the internet’s endless possibilities. Using a written planner helps to prevent that temptation.

Below, I highlight for teachers and students some specific organization and time-management strategies that have worked for many of the students I see in my office and at the schools I’ve consulted with in the past. I believe that organizing assignments and managing workflow are directly related to academic wellness, which centers on learning better ways to navigate our always-on world.

Virtual Folders and In-Real-Life Binders

When students came to see me 15 years ago, we would go through all their papers—*every single one*—and put them in binders, one for each subject, with five tabs:

1. “Notes,” for notes taken in class;
2. “Homework,” for assignments (those recently completed and ready to be turned in on the top, with returned work underneath);
3. “Handouts,” for any useful information a teacher might provide;
4. “Test/Quizzes,” for study guides and returned assessments; and
5. “Paper,” for extra loose-leaf paper.

Everything was hole-punched, and the front and back pockets of the binder were to remain empty. Within this framework, students adjusted as needed: my usual advice was that since it was their binder, *they* could figure out what would go where.

Written planners are a simple way to encourage monotasking and compartmentalization.

Today, things are a bit more complicated. Students at schools with one-to-one tablet or computer programs usually store the majority of their files on their computer or, more recently, in the cloud, using a file-sharing and content management system. Many students still have a few papers and need some sort of physical binder system, though one binder for each class seems somewhat excessive.

I encourage students to create a file folder on their tablet’s home screen or desktop for each of their classes and to create sub-folders within the individual class folders titled “Notes,” “Homework,” “Handouts,” and “Test/Quizzes.” Some students might want to break down those folders further by topics, chapters, or sections of information studied, but again, that is optional. Essentially, we take the physical system and transfer it into a digital one.

Teaching kids how to organize and file documents may seem mundane, but as someone who has seemingly filed over a million papers in my lifetime, I have witnessed the relief conveyed on the face of a child whose 892 pieces of loose-leaf paper now have a designated home. That same relief is apparent when I make students sit in my office and create digital file folders and file every digital document.



It’s not enough to simply have students create virtual folders and physical binders—there also needs to be time for a daily or weekly regrouping to help them stay organized. Nearly all students are well-meaning, starting out with the greatest intentions around organization, only to fall off track. Building in a daily or weekly regrouping can be done easily at home or in the classroom, and it can make a world of difference.

Mapping Out Assignments and Activities

Over the past decade, I’ve seen many schools with tablet and computer programs stop distributing paper planners—and then slowly realize their mistake. Many administrators reasoned that planners, which often end up lost, ripped, or unused, are a waste of paper and resources. They might not always be used or kept in ideal conditions, but there are a number of reasons why schools should rethink that decision—and why students should think about continuing to track assignments and activities with a written, visual planner, even if the school doesn’t provide one.

A written, visual planner enables students to keep all their assignments and activities in one place, ideally with ample room to record assignments, projects, and exams, as well as track activities, family events, and appointments. Students can easily number their assignments and prioritize, and they are potentially less distracted by the possibility of going online. In essence, written planners are a simple way to encourage monotasking and compartmentalization.

I encourage teachers to normalize the use of written planners by creating time and space for students to bring out their planners in class and write down their assignments. For teachers who believe there isn’t enough time to do so, I suggest thinking of the time as a preventive measure: three minutes spent daily prevents hours of dealing with missing assignments, school counselor inquiries for failing grades due to missing work, and parent conferences due to low performance.

I’m a fan of the following five-step process for managing tasks on a written planner—students can do this at home

or in class as part of a regular home-room or advisory activity:

1. Write down all the upcoming assignments for each class, including homework that is not due the next day. Students sometimes have several days to complete assignments, so I recommend they always start them (and, if possible, complete them) on the night the work is assigned, rather than the night before the assignment is due.
2. Add any tests, long-term projects, or essays by writing them at the top of the day they are due.
3. Add in any sports activities, family events, doctor's appointments, and social happenings.
4. Schedule in blocks of time for homework.
5. Number assignments in order of priority and check them off when completed.



Today's students live in a world of mini-multitasking. Merely scheduling time to do work using a written planner, or hoping students pay attention in class, doesn't do much when a student has seven different screens up and is being bombarded with different messages and notifications. Students who are listening to a lecture while managing two text conversations, checking social media, and seeing if the shoes they want are now on sale aren't able to process any of those things properly, and the mini-multitasking results in decreased productivity and increased exhaustion.

My goal is for students, teachers, and parents to recognize how compartmentalizing can increase productivity and decrease stress. For many people, compartmentalization and monotasking are underdeveloped skills that need to be developed over time. At first, it can feel uncomfortable, in a skin-crawling kind of way. But, I've had students diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder tell me they use the same strategies learned as a teenager in my office at their full-time job years later. There are certainly long-term benefits to learning those techniques early. □

Simple Study and Workflow Strategies

Use Dual Screens

Having dual screens for "work" and "social" can create a mindset of compartmentalization. On a work screen, all social media and other related sites are signed out of and potentially even blocked. The ultimate goal is to use the work screen to help maintain a sense of focus. Variations can be made for individual needs. For instance, some students put all potentially distracting apps in one digital folder. Most schools that issue tablets to students block the download of certain games and other distractions (this is by no means a foolproof solution, but it does provide some structure). Having students identify their own distractions and their best solutions for compartmentalization is an important first step.

Try the Pomodoro Technique

I generally recommend that middle school students spend 90 minutes to two hours per day on homework, and that high school students spend around two hours per day on homework (as with everything, this varies depending on many factors). For some students, two hours of homework seems like an extreme amount; for others, it seems like not nearly enough time. More often than not, though, when students start using monotasking and compartmentalization strategies, their homework gets done more quickly. The key is to work ahead on days when there isn't much homework that needs to be done immediately. For some students, it can seem overwhelming to work for a 90-minute or two-hour block. Using the Pomodoro Technique and spending 25 minutes of uninterrupted, focused time on one task, followed by a five-minute break, seems far more manageable. During the five-minute break, students should get up, walk around, go to the bathroom, get a snack, or the like, but should stay off social media and refrain from checking messages. Otherwise, those five-minute breaks can quickly become 45-minute breaks without so much as a second thought.

Use Technology to Encourage Compartmentalization

Even though social media and technology can provide students (and adults) with some of their biggest distractions, there are also wonderful tools to encourage compartmentalization. I often use the Forest app on my phone when I am writing because it helps me to stay focused for a set amount of time. While my phone remains untouched, a digital tree will grow. If I try to use my phone, I'm given a reminder along the lines of "Go back to the forest immediately to avoid killing the tree!" It really works. Many writers use Freedom to block out distractions while they're trying to work on the computer. I turn off my Wi-Fi as a simple solution. The key to any app that encourages compartmentalization is simplicity: it should be easy to use and ideally encourages a single-task focus.

—A.H.

Teaching the Rainbow

(Continued from page 21)

7. S. A. Brill and R. Pepper, *The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals* (Berkeley, CA: Cleis Press, 2008); and S. F. Leibowitz and N. P. Spack, "The Development of a Gender Identity Psychosocial Clinic: Treatment Issues, Logistical Considerations, Interdisciplinary Cooperation, and Future Initiatives," *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 20 (2011): 701–724.
8. Rafferty, "Gender-Diverse and Transgender Children"; Meier and Harris, "Fact Sheet"; K. R. Olson et al., "Mental Health of Transgender Children Who Are Supported in Their Identities," *Pediatrics* 137, no. 3 (2016): 1–8; and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *A Practitioner's Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children* (Rockville, MD: SAMHSA, 2014).

9. R. Bishop, "Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass," *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom* 6, no. 3 (Summer 1990): ix–xi.

10. C. M. Tschida, C. L. Ryan, and A. S. Ticknor, "Building on Windows and Mirrors: Encouraging the Disruption of 'Single Stories' through Children's Literature," *Journal of Children's Literature* 40, no. 1 (2014): 28–39.

11. J. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999).

12. C. N. Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," TED, July 2009.

13. K. Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. by K. Crenshaw et al. (New York: The New Press, 1991): 357–383.

14. C. L. Ryan and J. M. Hermann-Wilmarth, *Reading the Rainbow: LGBTQ-Inclusive Literacy Instruction in the Elementary Classroom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2018).

The Fight for Dyett

(Continued from page 35)

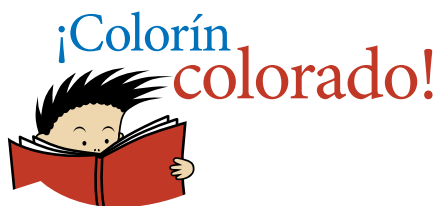
13. Chicago Public Schools, "CPS Announces New Dyett High School, Innovation Lab," press release, September 3, 2015.

14. "Chicago Hunger Strikers Enter Day 19 Challenging Rahm Emanuel's Push to Privatize Public Schools," *Democracy Now!*, September 4, 2015.

15. "Dyett Hunger Strike Post Strike Press Conference," YouTube video, 5:08, posted by "empathyeducates," September 22, 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZSpKy-RWc0.

16. S. Cholke, "Dyett Reopens with \$14.6M Upgrade a Year after Hunger Strike Stops Closure," *DNAinfo*, September 1, 2016.

17. M. Eltagouri and J. Perez Jr., "After Hunger Strike, Dyett Reopens as Arts-Focused Neighborhood High School," *Chicago Tribune*, September 6, 2016.



Looking for ways to teach and support your English language learners? Visit www.colorincolorado.org, the most widely used online resource for educators and families of ELLs for over a decade. Whether you need book lists, information on what works in the classroom, or tips to make kids feel welcome, **Colorín Colorado** is here for you!

New on Colorín Colorado

Across the country, immigrant students and families are facing great uncertainty. We've been hearing from AFT members looking for ways to ensure that schools and preschool settings remain safe, welcoming places for kids and their families. Our newest guide, "How to Support Immigrant Students and Families," includes more than 50 strategies that educators can use and share with colleagues, families, and community partners: www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide.



Colorín Colorado is a collaborative project of PBS Station WETA and the American Federation of Teachers.



ILLUSTRATION BY RAFAEL LÓPEZ

Exclusive AFT offer from Rosetta Stone, including a free headset.



Visit www.aft.org/RosettaStone for more information.



Credit Counseling

Debt and credit problems can happen to anyone at any time. Luckily, The Union Plus Credit Counseling program can help you regain your financial footing by helping you better manage your finances. Get free credit counseling from certified counselors.

Learn more at unionplus.org/aft





AFT TEACH

TOGETHER EDUCATING AMERICA'S CHILDREN

AFT TEACH 2019 Conference
July 11-13 | Washington, D.C.

Don't miss the AFT's signature biennial professional learning conference this summer! Attendees will:

- Hear from thought-provoking speakers like AFT President **Randi Weingarten**, #HipHopEd creator **Chris Emdin**, and founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence **Marc Brackett**;
- Participate in hands-on sessions with **turnkey tools and resources** to use in your school; and
- **Connect with colleagues** while collaborating on solutions to challenges facing your students, school, and community.

Register now at www.aft.org/TEACH.