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Grappling with the Pandemic

Let's Build Back Better Together

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

HOW DO YOU SHOW what you value? By walking your talk. While it's hard sometimes, it's always worth the effort. I learned that lesson yet again throughout October as I traveled coast to coast from California to Florida. 15 states. 33 days. 45 cities and towns. 94 events. All to get out the vote for the candidates and issues that walk the walk for a better life for working families, for our students, and for our communities.

Some days were exhausting, but I knew that thousands of AFT members were walking their talk too. In addition to the herculean efforts that our members have made in addressing the challenges of the pandemic, from taking care of patients to feeding and teaching kids, our members got involved in this election. In October alone, the effort to get Joe Biden and Kamala Harris elected involved thousands of volunteers who made over half a million phone calls. By November 3, more than 76 percent of our members had received their ballot or already voted.

I rode the AFT Votes bus to fight for a future in which teachers, nurses, and all other hard-working people are paid fair wages and have the conditions they need to do the work they love. I rode to support everyone who believes in science and is striving to end this horrific pandemic, to call on leaders to make safely reopening school buildings their top priority, to give out thousands of books and masks, and to help the hundreds of thousands who are hurting now. And I rode to assure one community after another that together we will rebuild America, making it fairer and more just.

In a survey soon after the election, 56 percent of Trump voters said he "stands up for America's values, history, and culture." That is difficult to understand for those of us who love America and *because of that love* are fighting to increase fairness and opportunity. But I believe we have shared aspirations to build on. We all want to feel safe—economically, emotionally, and physically—and we all believe in "liberty and justice for all." And yet, while some feel that their chance at the American dream has been slipping away, others feel that they have never truly had a chance. Our best hope is to band together, demanding the things we all want: jobs with good wages, healthcare that is affordable, and public schools that inspire and nurture our youth.

I believe we should start with our schools. Ninety percent of American children attend public schools. Public schools play a vital role in our children's lives, our communities, our economy, and our democracy. They can help heal our divided country: our public schools are where we both embrace America's diversity and forge a common identity. They are where we learn about the complex and troubling parts of our history, not to denigrate this great country, but so that our children see their role in creating "a more perfect Union" and develop their civic participation muscles.

No matter which party takes the majority in the Senate, our public schools will be—must be—places where we all come together. The talk of a vaccine gives some hope, but we still must tackle the current virus surge. We must give our schools the resources they need to reopen safely and to engage in social and emotional learning along with academics. Our kids will be better off, parents will have more work options, and the economy will have a chance to recover. Teachers and support staff have once again been heroic, doing everything they have been asked to do, but they are exhausted and scared. And they feel very alone.

President-elect Biden is committed to working with Congress to pass a COVID-19 relief package that will help reopen school buildings safely. Beyond that immediate relief, the Biden-Harris education plan fulfills the promise and purpose of our public schools as agents of opportunity and anchors of our communities. It pledges to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and triple Title I funding for students from low-income families. It will provide high-quality universal prekindergarten and double the number of psychologists, counselors, nurses, social workers, and other health professionals in our schools. It will restore the mission of the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights. And it will expand community schools, which provide vital wraparound services and enrichment opportunities.

Our public schools are where we embrace America's diversity and forge a common identity.

The election is over, but we are far from done. As we look forward to 2021, how will you show what you value? Will you call on local, state, and federal officials to fully fund public schools—to make them community hubs where all students and their families are safe and welcome? Where our young people's intellectual, emotional, and cultural development are recognized as equally important and fully intertwined? Where essential health and social services are accessible, and families are encouraged to speak up about their needs? And where, in response to our nation's deep divisions, new life is breathed into our democracy?

I often said that this election was about the soul of our nation. You are that soul. You cared, you fought, you showed up—and you voted. Now the real work begins, together. □

A Union of Professionals

Grappling with the Pandemic

The pandemic has laid bare and intensified systemic inequities, especially in health and education. Even as teachers and students mourn loved ones lost to COVID-19, it is essential that we look ahead and envision a bright future. Drawing wisdom from research and practice, these articles will support teachers who are striving to help students reach their potential.

Cover illustration:
JIA LIU

Supporting Social and Emotional Learning During COVID-19

Nearly a year into the pandemic, students nationwide are navigating unprecedented challenges. This additional strain is of great concern to teachers, making social and emotional learning (SEL) more important than ever. While we hope that an effective vaccine will soon be widely available, we know that emotional and economic recovery will take time. With support, students can develop skills, such as processing feelings in a healthy manner, that will benefit them for life. In this light, we feature several resources for SEL available through Share My Lesson.

A Pandemic-Related Priority

An essential first step to supporting students' learning is addressing the emotional impact of COVID-19. In the Share My Lesson webinar "Helping Children Regulate Emotions During Challenging Times," Marc Brackett, director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, unpacks how adults can support children in validating and managing their feelings. The webinar includes practical strategies for self-regulation and case studies that can spark discussions and help students grow.

Similarly, the webinar "Fostering SEL and Self-Care for Our Students in the Coronavirus Era" focuses on positive ways students from preschool through high school can handle stress and anxiety. Presented by Victoria Cheng-Gorini of Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, a Share My Lesson partner, the webinar offers guidelines for discussing difficult feelings and healthy ways to express them, such as through art, music, writing, and physical activities. For educators and caregivers facing pandemic-related stress in their own lives, the webinar also emphasizes the importance of self-care routines.

For those students who are grieving a loved one lost to COVID-19, the Coalition to Support Grieving Students, to which the AFT belongs, offers educators a free, comprehensive guide to its video and print resources. These include modules on connecting with families remotely and understanding grief triggers as well as information on organizations that support bereaved children and their families. Together, we can ensure that no student grieves alone.

Throughout the pandemic, it's crucial to ensure the educator-student bond remains strong. To that end, the webinar "Comprehensive Whole Child Development: SEL Tools for In-Person and Distance Learning" shows teachers how to bolster these connections. Presented by Jessica Jackson of Digital Promise, Rachael Wilcox of the Francis Howell School District, and Share My Lesson, the webinar offers constructive ways to help students manage their time and emotions.

Beyond COVID-19

Even outside the context of the pandemic, studies find that nearly half of all young people have experienced childhood trauma; without a caring adult offering assistance, trauma can impede children's social and emotional development. To support these students, educators can turn to a lesson titled "How to Help Students Below Their Age Appropriate Developmental Level for Social Emotional Learning." Provided by AFT partner First Book, the lesson is an excerpt of its "Trauma Toolkit," a free guide on what educators should know about adverse childhood experiences and ways to support student learning after trauma.

To help children in grades K–2 in developing social and emotional skills, Share My Lesson partner Discovery Education offers the lesson "Soar with Wings." The detailed, multiday modules use role-play to help students manage emotions and engage in responsible decision-making.

Another productive strategy students can use when they feel upset or angry comes from Share My Lesson partner Operation Respect. In a lesson titled "Creating a Peace Place," students figure out alternatives to inappropriate behavior, establish calming-down strategies, and cooperate with others to create a space in the classroom where they can self-regulate and feel better. Geared toward students in kindergarten through fifth grade, the lesson also includes modifications for students in grades six through twelve.

To see what other resources Share My Lesson offers on social and emotional learning, visit our entire collection of lesson plans, resources, and activities. If you have additional ideas or requests, please reach out to us at content@sharemylesson.com.

–THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM

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GRAPPLING WITH THE PANDEMIC

Recommended Resources

Helping Children Regulate Emotions During Challenging Times
go.aft.org/ae420sml1

Fostering SEL and Self-Care for Our Students in the Coronavirus Era
go.aft.org/ae420sml2

Supporting Grieving Students During a Pandemic
go.aft.org/ae420sml3

Comprehensive Whole Child Development: SEL Tools for In-Person and Distance Learning
go.aft.org/ae420sml4

How to Help Students Below Their Age Appropriate Developmental Level for Social Emotional Learning
go.aft.org/ae420sml5

Soar with Wings
go.aft.org/ae420sml6

Creating a Peace Place
go.aft.org/ae320sml7

Identifying and Teaching Students with Significant Reading Problems

"No child is born a reader; all children in literate societies have to be taught to read."[1]

"We are all good at speech, but disabled as readers and writers; the difference among us in reading/writing is simply that some are fairly easy to cure and some are not."[2]

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By Sharon Vaughn and Jack M. Fletcher

Helping children learn to read is big business. From expensive literacy curricula and remedial programs to one-day workshops and brain-training fads, there are too many claims of guaranteed success and too little focus on trustworthy findings. Having been researchers studying mechanisms for improving literacy outcomes for more than 30 years, we offer a more sober—and sobering—review of what is known about how to help struggling readers.

To begin, we confess that there are some rather large holes in our collective knowledge. We know more about the science of reading than the science of reading instruction. In other words, we know a lot more about what components are associated with improved outcomes for each stage of reading development (e.g., phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle are essential for beginning readers) than we do about how to teach all these components to a class of students with diverse learning needs. Similarly, we know more about interventions for students with mild to moderate reading difficulties than we do about students with severe reading difficulties. Students with very low reading skills—those at the bottom 10th percentile of word reading and lower—have been challenging to impact. Finally, in policy

development, we have not capitalized on theory and science for effectively implementing new practices in schools.[3] Still, there is much we do know that can support excellent instruction. Both here and in two online supplements—"It's Time to Act on a 20-Year-Old Consensus" (go.aft.org/vf_sb1) and "Three Things We Need to Learn" (go.aft.org/vf_sb2)—we offer guidance to prevent and address reading difficulties. There is no doubt that some children have reading disabilities, but the key to improved outcomes for the vast majority of struggling readers, including those with a reading disability, is enhanced core instruction—and that means enhanced curricula, assessments, pre-service and in-service professional development, and supports.

In the high-functioning system we describe below, the primary focus is on assessing changes in children's reading abilities as a response to instruction and on building educators' capacity to deliver more intense, customized interventions. To be effective, such assessments and interventions need to be delivered through a seamless system of well-coordinated general and special education supports that emphasizes prevention, reduces inappropriate referral to and placement in special education as a function of low reading ability, and provides more intensive interventions for students with reading disabilities. Inappropriate referral to and placement in special education is often a function of identifying students as needing special education who have not received an adequate opportunity to learn, as well as the view that special education is the solution for all children who do not readily learn to read. Some students are not given an opportunity to learn because they move frequently or are absent often; others are present day after day but are taught with programs and practices that are not based on the science of reading. Because so few teacher preparation programs, school districts, and commercially available programs have implemented consistently what we have learned from the science of reading, far too many students struggle—feeling like they are reading failures, not realizing that they were never provided the explicit instruction they need to succeed.* The vast majority of students with low reading achievement have preventable problems: with explicit, evidence-based instruction, they would learn to read.

These evidence-based practices are fundamental and necessary not only to develop strong readers but also to discern the differences between students with reading difficulties that can be readily supported through general education from those with serious reading disabilities or dyslexia. For the purposes of this article, we are using *reading disabilities* and *dyslexia* synonymously to refer to children with foundational decoding and spelling problems.

Students in classrooms where evidence-based fundamentals of reading instruction are deliberately implemented are far less likely to demonstrate reading difficulties. Enhanced general education instruction in the early grades reduces the number of children who do not meet grade-level benchmarks and start to fall behind, and therefore it reduces eventual referrals to special education.

We recognize that teachers—even those with the most advanced knowledge and skills—cannot and should not be asked to carry the entire burden of improving reading outcomes for all

learners. We think there is ample evidence to suggest that educational systems can be organized so that the vast majority of students—close to 95 percent—will be reasonably successful readers when these organized systems are effectively implemented.[4] The roughly 5 percent of students who do not make adequate progress when these systems are in place are likely truly reading disabled because of the persistence of their reading difficulties. They too can improve their reading skills, but they require highly specialized, intensive interventions and may have difficulty reading throughout their lives.

Assessments and interventions need to be delivered through a seamless system that emphasizes prevention.

Why Do Some Children Learn to Read Easily, While Others Struggle?

Learning to read is a process that occurs so readily for some youngsters that it seems to develop almost naturally. With minimal guidance and feedback, some students are on their way to recognizing the patterns of written words and inferring the ways in which our phonological system (sounds of language) map to our complex orthography (written system). But for other students—anywhere from 40 to 65 percent—the task of learning to read is much more challenging. If these students do not receive highly explicit instruction with additional opportunities for implicit learning, difficulties in learning to read proficiently are inevitable. These more challenging readers are the ones who require the most knowledgeable and skillful teachers.

Reading science has established that learning to read is an acquired process, not a natural process—it's nothing like learning to walk or talk. There are no brain systems evolutionarily designed for reading. Rather, neural circuits for language and visual processing must be repurposed and reorganized to support literacy.[5] One neural circuit involves the ability to process sublexical units of words, initially at the phonological level. The child must take what is essentially an implicit understanding of the sound system of language and explicitly apply it to print.[6] Once this repurposing begins, another neural circuit designed for face and object recognition has to become a rapid letter and word processor; this reorganization of the circuit requires considerable meaningful exposure to print. As these circuits are revamped, they form a system, which usually takes several years to become well developed, that enables the child to process print with immediate access to the meaning of the word, which is sometimes described as "language at the speed

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*To learn more about how preparation programs, professional development, and other key supports could be improved, see "Teaching Reading *Is* Rocket Science" in the Summer 2020 issue of *American Educator*: aft.org/ae/summer2020/moats.

of sight."[7] If a child does not have access because of struggles with mastering the alphabetic principle, this system does not develop adequately and the child falls behind in the ability to automatically recognize letter patterns. Reading becomes an effortful, unenjoyable process. Because all children must reorganize these neural circuits into a reading brain, prevention programs must focus on early acquisition of these skills. It is very hard to catch up if mastering the alphabetic principle is delayed. This is why prevention is more effective and less costly than remediation.[8]

Students with reading disabilities have great difficulty acquiring foundational, word-level reading skills; they do not decode words accurately or fluently, and often they have poor spelling. Except for assessing to determine children's responses to instruction, there are no effective methods for differentiating subgroups of children with word-level problems. *Students with reading disabilities (dyslexia) are real* and represent the largest group of children in special education, even though in many cases stronger instruction in the earlier grades may have prevented the special education referral; they also comprise a large portion of the general education population that does not read well but has not been identified for special education.

Preventing reading difficulties is about making sure every child is exposed to reading instruction that is sufficiently explicit and customized to support the acquisition of foundational skills within a language-rich learning environment that promotes vocabulary and background knowledge. This will reduce unnecessary special education referral and identification. Students with significant,

18 Common Misunderstandings of Dyslexia

1 *Students benefit from waiting until after second grade to provide reading intervention (False).* Early screening and intervention provide opportunities for targeting reading needs and reducing the likelihood of long-term reading difficulties.

2 *Dyslexia requires specific and unique screening and identification approaches (False).* Psychometrically sound approaches currently used to screen and identify students with reading problems are useful for screening and identifying students with dyslexia. Layering additional screening measures onto already psychometrically sound screening approaches is an unnecessary burden.[9]

3 *Providing more opportunities to read books will resolve their reading problem (False).* All students benefit from increased opportunities to read a variety of text levels and types. However, additional reading practice for students with dyslexia is an inadequate approach to improving their reading outcomes. These students also require comprehensive approaches to reading instruction that include decoding, opportunities to practice for fluency, and comprehension instruction.

4 *Colored lenses or overlays help improve reading for students with dyslexia (False).* Though the issue of colored lenses and overlays continues to appear in a range of professional guides, there is no evidence to support their effectiveness.[10] Similarly, multisensory instruction is not necessary for students with dyslexia. However, there are many systematic approaches to improving reading outcomes for students with dyslexia.

5 *Students with dyslexia primarily have reading comprehension problems (False).* Students with dyslexia have word-level difficulties that are manifested in difficulty reading text accurately and proficiently. These word-level difficulties result in reading comprehension problems, but teaching reading comprehension strategies alone will not resolve the reading problems of individuals with dyslexia.[11]

6 *Many educators have not had opportunities to develop the knowledge necessary to provide evidence-based screening, assessment, and interventions for students with dyslexia (True).* There is considerable research documenting the need for educators to have improved knowledge and skills for better identifying and teaching students with dyslexia and other reading problems.[12] Many reading teachers perceive that they lack the confidence to teach students who are identified as dyslexic.[13]

7 *Dyslexia is rare, and most individuals grow out of it (False).* Dyslexia is a universal condition that occurs across writing systems, not just the alphabetic system, with prevalence rates of approximately 5–15 percent depending on the threshold for poor reading.[14] While the manifestations of dyslexia can dissipate because of effective instruction, most individuals with dyslexia who show intractability to effective instruction have slow and labored reading throughout their lives.[15]

8 *Dyslexia operates on a continuum in which the severity can be represented as mild to severe (True).* Dyslexia does not look precisely the same for all learners, and the range of reading difficulties because of dyslexia also vary, but reading is normally distributed in the population (i.e., a small percentage of people are excellent readers, most are average or close to it, and a small percentage are very weak readers), and dyslexia is the lower end of this distribution.[16]

9 *Many students with dyslexia display difficulties with spelling and handwrit-*

intractable reading problems that are not responsive to evidence-based instruction meet an important threshold for special education referral and identification. However, students who have not consistently had access to evidence-based instruction (because they are absent often or because their school district is not aware of the science of reading) are the students for whom reading difficulties can be prevented. While adequately addressing all the issues related to reading disabilities and dyslexia is beyond the scope of this article, we highlight "18 Common Misunderstandings of Dyslexia" below.

How Should Educational Systems Be Organized So That the Vast Majority of Students Learn to Read?

Nearly two decades ago, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education[17] made three recommendations that—if fully implemented—could dramatically improve the instruction children receive and their reading achievement. The first recommendation was to *focus on results, not process.* The commission observed that special education was a highly bureaucratic process that did a good job in providing civil rights

protection once a child was identified, but did not show strong evidence for accelerated gains in learning. It recommended the simplification of paperwork requirements and a change in monitoring of school-based implementation of special education to a focus on outcomes.

The second recommendation was to *embrace a model of prevention, not a model of failure.* Many literacy problems can be

ing (True). Students with dyslexia often have difficulties not only with reading words but also with spelling and writing words. Effective instructional approaches target word reading, spelling, and writing.

10 *Dyslexia has a familial and genetic association (True).* There is a much higher rate of dyslexia in families with a familial history of dyslexia—as high as 45 percent in most studies.[18]

11 *Improving home literacy will resolve dyslexia (False).* It is not useful to consider the home environment as the causal factor for dyslexia. While opportunities to read are beneficial to all learners, improving home literacy will not resolve reading challenges for individuals with dyslexia.

12 *Brain training can improve reading outcomes for students with dyslexia (False).* Many approaches to improving dyslexia falsely claim that they can "train" the brains of individuals with dyslexia resulting in improved reading outcomes. Cognitive training in isolation of a reading program does not generalize to improved academic outcomes.[19]

13 *Only certified language therapists are capable of providing effective reading interventions for students with dyslexia (False).* Educators with

extensive knowledge of the science and practice of reading instruction who are using evidence-based practices are prepared to meet the needs of students with dyslexia.

14 *Students with dyslexia see letters and words backwards (False).* Perhaps one of the oldest and most persistent myths regarding individuals with dyslexia is that they see and write letters and words backwards or upside down. Many young children reverse letters when beginning reading and writing; with instructional practice and feedback, this issue is remedied.[20]

15 *Vision therapy is an effective approach for students with dyslexia (False).* The faulty idea that dyslexia is a result of a vision disorder of some type has been very slow to go away. Many vision training approaches exist and have not been associated with any improvements in reading for individuals with dyslexia, including a recent randomized trial that showed no effect of optometric exercises on reading skills.[21]

16 *Dyslexia can be addressed with medications (False).* There is no medication that will remedy word reading difficulties. While many students with dyslexia also demonstrate difficulties with attention and may be diagnosed

with attention deficit disorder, medications appropriate for these students are aimed at their attention problems, not their reading difficulties per se, and the medications do not lead to improved decoding.[22]

17 *Students with dyslexia are more creative, gifted, and talented than other students (False).* There are many highly skilled and capable individuals with dyslexia who have gifts and talents. Just like in the population as a whole, not all individuals with dyslexia would be identified with extraordinary gifts or talents.

18 *Classroom teachers can be a valuable asset to remedying difficulties for students with dyslexia (True).* Classroom teachers may be the most important and valuable resource for students with dyslexia. Classroom teachers are their primary reading teachers as well as the educators who have the most influence on their self-worth. Classroom teachers can be a tremendous source of social-emotional and educational support for students with dyslexia. Armed with the knowledge and skills, classroom teachers can alter the learning and life trajectories of students with dyslexia.

–S. V. and J. M. F.

resolved with early intervention, so the commission advocated for universal screening, progress monitoring, and increasingly intense intervention based on instructional response; prevention was to start upon school entry and be supported by special education personnel. These methods, originally subsumed under a response to intervention (RTI) rubric, are now often referred to as multiple tiers of systematic support (MTSS).

It is better to over-identify children at risk for reading problems as early as possible than to under-identify.

The third recommendation was to *consider children with disabilities as general education children first*. Although requirements for placement in the least restrictive environment result in many children with reading disabilities spending the bulk of their school day in general education, there is often little alignment between the approaches to literacy instruction in general and special education. The primary special education intervention often involves accommodations, not remedial interventions to significantly improve students' reading ability.

We, as well as others, have summarized a model for preventing reading difficulties that aligns with an RTI/MTSS approach.[23] The fundamental principle of prevention is screening to identify risk early.[24] The idea is that it is better to over-identify children at risk for reading problems as early as possible and provide

necessary instruction than to under-identify and have large numbers of students who suffer as their problems linger without the required instructional supports. An overview of this system for preventing reading difficulties is illustrated in the "Tiers of Instruction" below.

In this seamless, supportive system, all students are screened. Those at risk for reading difficulties receive continued evidence-based Tier 1 literacy instruction in the classroom, ongoing progress monitoring, and, if needed, a Tier 2 intervention that addresses their specific literacy problems. This Tier 2 intervention may be provided by the classroom teacher, a trained teaching assistant supervised by the classroom teacher, or an educational specialist such as a reading teacher. Tier 2 interventions are not part of a special education but rather an extension or supplement within general education. Students participate in Tier 2 intervention for a specified period of time, typically 8–12 weeks, with ongoing progress monitoring, approximately every two weeks. Using progress monitoring data and teachers' observations, each student's response to literacy instruction is determined (e.g., is the student reaching expected benchmarks?).

If the student's response is not sufficient to meet progress monitoring benchmarks, there are several options, including adjusting the instruction, changing the group, adjusting the group size, changing the intervention, or providing an increasingly intensive intervention (which may be longer, e.g., 30–45 minutes rather than 20 minutes, and more customized to each student's needs). If inadequate instructional response continues, the educational team or parent/guardian may determine that an eligibility evaluation for special education is in order. The advantage to this approach is that students are provided appropriate, evidence-based instruction early; for the majority of students, this rapid Tier 2 intervention is adequate for becoming strong readers. Only those students with persistent and significant reading difficulties would be referred for special education or dyslexia services.

Throughout this model, screening and progress monitoring are critical. Most schools across the United States are imple-

Tiers of Instruction

The Tiers of Instruction describes a model for providing increasingly customized reading interventions to students at risk for reading problems. Commonly presented as a triangle, we have tipped the triangle to emphasize the primacy of Tier 1 instruction for all students. Tiers 2 and 3 increase intensity for students who do not respond adequately to instruction. The percentages represent estimates, based on effective implementation of a multi-tiered system, of how many children are likely to be at or near grade level and only need Tier 1 (effective, evidence-based instruction for the whole class), at risk of reading difficulties and require Tier 2 (targeted, efficient supplemental instruction), or at risk of severe challenges and require Tier 3 (intensive, customized intervention, often with special education and/or dyslexia services).

Core Instruction
Universal Screening
Progress Monitoring
Differentiated in Classroom
1
(75–90%)

Supplemental Instruction
Standard Protocol
Small Group
Frequent Progress Monitoring
2
(10–25%)

Intense Intervention
Individualized
Frequent Progress Monitoring
3
(2–10%)

menting screening approaches to reading difficulties that ostensibly identify those youngsters who are at risk for reading failure. It is mandated for dyslexia in over 40 states.[25] Effective screeners (1) require 10 minutes or less per child, (2) demonstrate strong psychometric properties (e.g., are valid and reliable), (3) provide readily usable data that identify students as either at risk or not at risk, (4) are developmentally appropriate and can be administered two to three times per year, and (5) are easily scored. Errors in identifying which children are at risk of reading difficulties are inevitable, but we think schools should focus on reducing errors that result in *not* identifying risk (false negatives). In other words, it is better for a child who does not need extra instruction to get it than for a child who does need extra instruction to go without.

For progress monitoring, short probes involving timed word or passage reading are used so that teachers can make instructional decisions.[26] These types of assessments are aimed at improving instruction and determining each student's incremental progress, recognizing that for students who are consistently making inadequate progress, additional interventions may be warranted. (For an easy-to-use review of progress monitoring tools, see charts.intensiveintervention.org/aprogressmonitoring.)

Progress monitoring data can be useful in many ways. First, these data can document that students are learning the critical aspects of reading (e.g., sound-spelling patterns, vocabulary) being taught. Second, the types of responses students provide can guide instruction by highlighting each student's needs for reteaching and additional practice, while those elements that appear to be successfully learned can be monitored for maintenance. Third, data from these measures can facilitate decisions about curriculum (e.g., whether additional or different programs are needed), grouping (e.g., some students may benefit from a more advanced group; others may benefit from a mini one-on-one lesson to enhance performance), and interventions (e.g., whether to continue an intervention). Fourth, these data—especially ongoing progress monitoring data—can inform decisions about referral to and placement in special education. If special education eligibility becomes an issue, the best signal is the intractability of the child's reading problems when provided with the explicit instruction that works for most children.

How Can a Supportive, Integrated General and Special Education System Be Implemented?

Developing a systemic approach to supporting teachers so that they can meet the needs of the range of readers in their classrooms requires ongoing screening, monitoring students' responses to instruction so that teachers can adjust instruction to meet students' needs, and fidelity of implementation to ensure adherence to treatment protocols. But seamlessly assembling all these pieces is not easy.

First, most educators, including teachers and school leaders, would benefit from ongoing *situated professional development* that builds on the knowledge they have and extends it in ways that may be readily implemented in their school setting. What happens when you say "professional development" to most educators? Do they smile with anticipation about what they will learn and how they can implement it in their school? Typically, no. Too often, professional development is a one-day exposure to ideas (of varying quality), many of which are lost before the next day at school.

> Building up the seamless system takes time and a great deal of in-class support for teachers.

We are suggesting a distributed professional development model that provides ongoing learning opportunities as each aspect of the new system is launched. This model can follow standards like those from Learning Forward (learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning). Workshops on how to screen children and offer highly effective Tier 1 instruction would be followed with in-class coaching and support until the majority of educators were aligning their practices with data on outcomes. Then, educators would learn how to extend their Tier 1 practices with Tier 2 supplemental interventions, increasing time in literacy instruction for students who are not making sufficient progress. This would ensure that the instruction children receive in Tiers 1 and 2 is well aligned, which increases effectiveness.

Adding Tier 3 instruction requires yet more professional development, coaching, and coordination. Tier 3 more intensively focuses intervention on students' skill gaps and may be guided by more diagnostic and progress monitoring assessments. Students in Tier 3 may be candidates for special education and/or dyslexia identification and services. Because of the focus on individual skill gaps, it is not as tightly aligned with Tier 1 (regular classroom instruction), but Tier 1 remains essential for providing a comprehensive reading program. For example, a child receiving Tier 3 intervention for specific decoding skills needs Tier 1 core instruction to continue progressing in vocabulary, listening comprehension, writing across genres, and other aspects of English language arts.

Building up the seamless system takes time and a great deal of in-class support for teachers—but it is far more effective than scattershot workshops. Preventing and addressing reading difficulties

is hard, but the effort pays big dividends in reducing reading difficulties. We urge schools, districts, and states to put far more effort into systemic supports (especially the professional development and coaching for teachers and administrators described here). We recommend beginning in grade 1, where the strongest evidence of the efficacy of these approaches exists, and then expanding to other grades.

What Can Teachers Do Now to Support Students with Reading Difficulties or with Mild to Moderate Disabilities or Dyslexia?

Most of what we describe above requires system-level change. But teachers want to do what's best for their students today. Here are six steps that teachers can implement in their classrooms now (and that school leaders should start supporting immediately).

Far too many students and teachers are struggling. It is long past time for leaders to step up.

1. *Use academic learning time deliberately and purposefully to ensure students receive the maximum amount of evidence-based instruction.* Academic engagement—i.e., time on task—is an excellent predictor of academic outcomes.[27] Consider how much time you spend explicitly teaching and providing highly focused instructional time. Observation studies reveal that surprisingly little class time is devoted to explicitly teaching the high-priority skills associated with improved reading outcomes.[28] Consider ways to structure your classroom, teaching, and resources so that maximum time is spent on instruction and minimal time is lost to transitions, over-explaining, and behavioral management.

2. *Consider the value of the one-minute lesson.* Many students with significant reading difficulties benefit from a one-minute lesson in which they are provided a mini review of a challenging task, an opportunity to practice word reading with feedback, or a chance to demonstrate what they know with feedback. Time is always an issue, but do not allow it to block you from spending highly focused instructional minutes with the students who need you the most.

3. *Offer customized instruction that reflects students' learning needs.* Many of the students you teach learn to read almost effortlessly. However, students with reading difficulties, disabilities, or dyslexia require highly customized instruction that aligns with their specific learning needs. How can you determine what this customized instruction might be? Examine their screening and progress monitoring data. Determine the high-priority areas in which they require additional instruction and practice. Identify ways to include this type of work each day in an individual mini lesson or with a small group of students with similar needs. Provide practice opportunities with feedback so they have multiple opportunities to acquire proficiency.

4. *Give struggling readers instruction in small groups, in pairs, or one on one.* Many students with reading difficulties benefit from the specialized instruction that is allowable in small-group, paired, and one-on-one instruction. These formats provide opportunities to tailor instruction to their needs with appropriate practice and targeted feedback.

5. *Create many opportunities to read a range of text types and a range of text levels.* Students who struggle with reading benefit from opportunities to generalize their reading to varied text types, including digital texts, informational texts, and narrative texts as well as hybrid informational and narrative texts such as biographies. This variation in text types is not just for older students but can be part of the listening comprehension and text reading of younger students, including beginning readers. Also, consider ways to vary the text levels that students read. Students can read and comprehend more advanced texts when they have adequate background knowledge, are motivated by the topic, and/or have additional instructional support.

Hope for the Lowest-Achieving Readers

Maureen Lovett and her colleagues are among the very few scholars who tackle developing and implementing interventions for students whose word reading troubles are intractable.[29] One promising program is called PHAST: Phonological and Strategy Training.[30] PHAST uses components based on direct instruction principles and strategy training with a metacognitive approach to promote generalization of word recognition strategies. In one study,[31] children gained about half of a standard deviation (which is a relatively large gain among this population) in reading skills after 70 hours of instruction. Similarly, researchers[32] found good growth when they provided a Tier 3 intervention to children who did not respond to Tier 1 or 2 instruction. The intervention consisted of about 70 hours of decoding instruction (delivered daily, two hours per day) followed by a fluency intervention for another eight weeks at an hour per day. The children's reading achievement increased by about two-thirds of a standard deviation, and about half of the children met grade-level benchmarks.

Unfortunately, it is difficult for schools to provide this level of intensity, although it seems essential for helping the lowest-achieving students. Through after-school and summer school programs, districts and states should find ways to provide this type of intensive intervention.
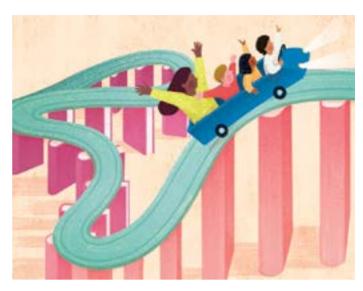
–S. V. and J. M. F.

6. *Provide explicit instruction that incorporates clear feedback.* Explicit instruction with feedback is highly effective, especially when students are having difficulty learning with less explicit methods. Teachers who offer this type of evidence-based instruction do the following:

- Identify, prior to teaching, what they expect the students to do or say.
- State clearly and in as few words as possible what they need students to know.
- Model what they expect students to say or do.
- Ask students to demonstrate what is expected (e.g., blend phonemes, read a word, read a text silently).
- Provide prompt feedback that is specific and clear (e.g., "I heard several of you blending the sounds /r/, /a/, /t/ and then saying the word 'rat.' That is what I expect. I also heard several of you *only* saying the word 'rat' and not blending the sounds. I will give you three more sounds, and I want everyone to both blend the sounds and say the word.").
- Give selected students opportunities to respond independently (and avoid only calling on the most capable students).
- Control the task difficulty by making the task less difficult for students in need of adaptation and then gradually increasing the task difficulty as their performance improves.
- Maintain high levels of student success, engagement, and response.

Wrap Up

The degree to which a student expresses a reading difficulty is always an interaction between the child's opportunity to learn (due to absences, instructional quality, or other issues) and the extent of the student's reading impairment. Thus, youngsters who are provided a genuine opportunity to learn to read—including high-quality, explicit, evidence-based instruction—and yet still present with significant reading difficulties are likely to have a severe reading impairment. In contrast, children who have not consistently been able to access high-quality, evidence-based instruction and present with significant reading difficulties are likely to have reading problems that could have been prevented and still can be remediated. This difference is of the utmost importance. Currently, there are students with preventable reading problems who are suffering academically and emotionally, and who are placed in special education often to receive accommodations without effective remediation. And there are students with severe reading disabilities or dyslexia who are not getting the intensive interventions they need—in part because special education is overwhelmed with large numbers of students who do not actually have reading disabilities.

This must end, but teachers cannot solve these problems on their own. These are systemic problems—and that is why we have proposed a new, seamless, three-tiered system of general and special education to address them. Far too many students and teachers are struggling. It is long past time for leaders of schools, districts, and states—not to mention teacher preparation programs, curriculum developers, and professional development providers—to step up, change their policies and programs, and focus on meeting children's needs. □

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High-Leverage Practices

Teaching Students with Disabilities—and All Students Who Need a Learning Boost

By Mary T. Brownell, Stephen Ciullo, and Michael J. Kennedy

Jacqueline is a sixth-grade special education teacher whose school district recently decided to implement an inclusive approach to teaching and learning. Now special and general educators collaborate to provide a stronger system of instructional supports based on their analysis of students' data. Jacqueline and her colleagues are systematically supporting students with disabilities and others who are struggling in one or more academic or behavioral domains. After months of online

learning due to the coronavirus pandemic, they now have a hybrid model in which students are on staggered schedules, coming to school two days a week. While some families have been able to adjust, many are experiencing a great deal of stress. More students than ever are slipping behind, acting out, and withdrawing. The whole sixth-grade instructional team has been searching for more effective practices to foster academic, social, and emotional development.

Jacqueline's sixth-grade general education colleagues have started to teach using modeling with think-alouds and strategies like summarizing text. They are also using specific scaffolds, including graphic organizers, to better accommodate students' learning needs. When working with students in small groups, Jacqueline reteaches strategies, models foundational skills necessary for successful participation in the general education curriculum, and helps her students learn to use accommodations that will support learning in both settings (such as text-to-speech software so that students who are still developing reading skills have access to grade-level content).

The changes Jacqueline and her colleagues are making seem to be working. Almost all the students with disabilities and the students who have been struggling during the pandemic are securing better grades and seem more motivated to participate in instruction. Many are even beginning to show their peers how to use strategies they learned in Jacqueline's small groups.

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Jacqueline and her general education colleagues have always worked hard and been dedicated to their students, but in the past their instructional strategies were not well coordinated. As they started working together more closely to adopt the inclusive model, they also dug into research on how to accelerate learning. They found that agreeing on some foundational ideas—like collaborating so that core and supplemental instruction are tightly connected and being more specific about students' learning goals and the scaffolds the team would use to meet them—made a big difference in their team's day-to-day work and their students' development.

Jacqueline's experience is in keeping with what research has established: students with disabilities can achieve content-area standards and meet social and emotional milestones when they are consistently provided the instructional practices and accommodations that best support their learning. Decades of research have defined effective instructional practices that general and special education teachers can use to help students with disabilities, and students without disabilities who need additional supports, achieve better academic and social-emotional outcomes.[1] These well-researched, trustworthy instructional practices are freely available through national centers like the IRIS Center (iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu) and the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center (ceedar.org), and in publications like Practice Guides published through the Institute of Education Sciences (ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/practiceguides).

The challenge for teachers, however, is translating the many research-based instructional practices that exist into daily classroom instruction. Classrooms are complex environments, and teachers must attend to many demands. Time to study, try out, and reflect on new practices is in short supply. And time to do so collaboratively as an instructional team is all too rare. To address this problem, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and CEEDAR convened scholars, researchers, practitioners, teacher preparation faculty, and advocates to carefully review the literature and identify high-leverage practices that improve instruction across different content domains and grade levels for students with disabilities and for other students with learning differences. These practices, when used over time, are designed to support and enhance teachers' implementation of content-specific, research-based practices in such areas as reading, writing, mathematics, and social-emotional learning. (To learn more about these practices and the professional learning system that states, teacher preparation programs, and school districts ought to provide for general and special education teachers, see the companion article, "Systemic Support for Special Education: Making It a More Integral Part of General Teacher Preparation," which begins on page 18.)

What Are High-Leverage Practices?

High-leverage practices (HLPs) are instructional approaches educators in K–12 can use to teach different types of learners and content.[2] The working group convened by CEC and CEEDAR identified 22 such practices after spending 18 months engaged in the following process: discussing research on effective instruction, distilling that research into a manageable set of practices, incorporating feedback from several focus groups, presenting practices to the CEC representative assembly, and finalizing the HLPs with the CEC executive board. The group deemed the selected practices "high leverage" because they are foundational to effective instruction, they help with managing and intervening in students' behavior, and they support successful implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (the legislation guaranteeing that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education with their nondisabled peers to the extent that is possible[3]). The 22 practices are organized into four essential aspects of teachers' work: collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral, and instruction. (For the complete list of practices, see page 15.)

> Researchers, practitioners, faculty, and others identified 22 high-leverage practices that improve instruction.

In this article, we describe two HLPs that are foundational for delivering effective instruction: (1) use explicit instruction, and (2) provide high-quality feedback. Research shows that teachers can use these two practices in general and special education classrooms to improve student outcomes. In addition, they are a great starting place for implementing other HLPs. In describing these two HLPs, we provide examples of how teachers might use them. We also provide a list of resources teachers can use to support their implementation (see page 17).

Explicit Instruction

Explicit instruction (HLP 16) is one of the most well-researched HLPs for teaching students with disabilities in grades K–12. When teachers provide explicit instruction, they make clear for students how to engage in a particular skill, how to be strategic when they approach a task (such as solving a mathematics problem or summarizing a paragraph), or how to define a concept using examples and nonexamples. Explicit instruction has been shown repeatedly to promote skill learning in many domains, problem-solving approaches in mathematics, and strategic thinking in disciplinary literacy instruction.[4]

Most educators agree that explicit instruction includes the following components:[5]

- Break down (or segment) the learning task.
- Set clear, measurable, and feasible lesson objectives.
- Provide numerous opportunities for students to respond to prompts of varying difficulty, and deliver immediate feedback.
- Model by demonstrating and thinking aloud.
- Provide guided and engaging practice.
- Promote student independence.

In the following sections, we describe each component of explicit instruction and provide examples to support implementa-

tion. We suggest that teachers spend extra time learning how to engage in the explicit instruction component of *modeling*, as researchers have found that many teachers find modeling difficult and could benefit from additional professional development.[6]

Break down (or segment) the learning task. During planning, teachers break down a learning task by analyzing the concept, strategy, or skill and listing key steps needed to teach it. For concepts, they think carefully about an appropriate definition and select examples and nonexamples that will elucidate the critical features or dimensions of the concept when teaching.

> ## Explicit instruction has been shown to promote skill learning and strategic thinking.

Here's an example from Jacqueline and one of the general education teachers, Tanisha; they want to use a graphic organizer to help students write persuasive essays. During a joint planning session, they list steps students need to learn in order to use a graphic organizer to map out ideas before writing. Jacqueline and Tanisha (1) decide how they will explain the graphic organizer's purpose; (2) set a measurable learning objective for each lesson; (3) script what they will say while thinking aloud—including the specific topic, examples, and nonexamples—when they model how to map out ideas with a graphic organizer; and (4) choose guided practice and independent practice activities to help students learn to use the graphic organizer. Jacqueline and Tanisha also consider scaffolds, such as speech-to-text software, that some of their students with disabilities may need to record their ideas.

Set clear, measurable, and feasible lesson objectives. This aspect of explicit instruction has been widely adopted. Many teachers begin every lesson by presenting an objective. The most effective approach is to provide a specific and measurable objective that can be accomplished in the time allocated for the lesson; they display the objective (e.g., on a dry-erase board), read it to the students, and discuss its importance. They also conclude each lesson by reviewing those aspects of the objective that were accomplished.

When introducing the graphic organizer for persuasive writing, Jacqueline and Tanisha explain to students that they will learn how to use a graphic organizer to develop a persuasive essay. They display and discuss the lesson objective: "Students will correctly explain to a partner the purpose of writing to persuade as well as how a graphic organizer can be used to organize key ideas and plan before we write." After introducing and discussing real-world examples of the genre and the purpose of persuasive writing, they explain each part of the graphic organizer, along with its function. Tanisha and Jacqueline provide several writing samples that include a graphic organizer and several others that do not. They then ask students to "explain to a partner the purpose of writing to persuade as well as how this particular graphic organizer will be used to organize ideas and plan before we write." To see if their learning objective has been met or if additional teaching is needed, Tanisha and Jacqueline close the lesson by assigning student pairs to report back on what they discussed.

Provide numerous opportunities for students to respond to prompts of varying difficulty, and deliver immediate feedback. A key element of explicit instruction is to provide students with numerous opportunities to respond to prompts. This both engages students in the learning process and enables teachers to assess understanding and learning. Teachers should be deliberate in terms of crafting opportunities to respond so they reflect the spectrum of difficulty (e.g., rote or deep/probing questions) and modalities (e.g., responses that are choral, gestural, individual, or written). Jacqueline and Tanisha use planning time to make decisions about what types of opportunities to respond each lesson will feature, and which individual students Jacqueline will focus on to demonstrate their learning. Wanting to ensure that Tanisha calls on many different students while she facilitates a whole-group discussion of which writing samples are or are not examples of persuasive essays, they decide she will use a system that helps keep students engaged: drawing popsicle sticks with students' names on them from a cup. Jacqueline and Tanisha also plan how they will provide students with immediate and specific feedback (the second high-leverage practice we discuss in this article). Feedback reinforces students' efforts and prevents them from unintentionally learning incorrect information.

Model by demonstrating and thinking aloud. Modeling includes the following steps: (1) demonstrating, (2) thinking aloud while demonstrating, and sometimes (3) presenting examples and nonexamples to reinforce learning. Although some educators assume that modeling is more applicable to elementary school, modeling is also relevant in grades 6–12, as well as in college and the workplace.* For instance, a 10th-grade history teacher can use modeling with a think-aloud to demonstrate some strategies for detecting bias in documents from a website. Steps may include demonstrating how to navigate to and within a website, describing the criteria he uses to evaluate a document for bias (such as looking for funding sources, for representation of multiple perspec-

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*For more on the importance of modeling in schooling, see "'Cognitive Apprenticeship' Revisited" in the Fall 2020 issue of *American Educator*: aft.org/ae/fall2020/kirschner_hendrick.

tives, or for acknowledgements of limitations of the work), and thinking aloud while he applies that criteria to evaluate the credibility of different documents (e.g., news articles, speeches, or policy papers). Time spent in the modeling phase is determined by skill complexity (e.g., modeling a cursive letter for third-graders versus a multistep algorithm for students in precalculus).

Jacqueline and Tanisha model with a think-aloud to show students how to use their notes from the graphic organizer to compose sentences for their persuasive essays. Jacqueline begins the model by showing students how to take two words from her graphic organizer, "vegan options," to write an introductory sentence. Jacqueline states, "My notes are brief, but contain good ideas. My notes say 'vegan options' for the introduction to my paragraph. Hmm, how will I turn this into a great sentence? Well, what I believe is that there should be at least one vegan option each day. I'll write, 'I believe the time has come for students to have a daily vegan option for lunch.' I like my sentence because it conveys to readers where I stand!" To demonstrate, Jacqueline writes the sentence on the board as she talks through the process.

Provide guided and engaging practice. In this component of explicit instruction, teachers plan highly interactive practice activities to build students' proficiency. Teachers ask students multiple questions to assess understanding or provide multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they are learning by showing their work. Teachers then provide quality feedback on students' responses.

Tanisha and Jacqueline realize that many students will require considerable support to independently write a persuasive essay. Along with breaking down lessons for each step—use a graphic organizer to plan ideas, convert notes into an essay, and revise and publish their essays—they also conduct guided practice for each step. In one guided practice session, Jacqueline, Tanisha, and their students generate ideas and notes for the graphic organizer based on the prompt: "Should the voting age be lowered to 17?" Through discussion, the class decides that 17 years old is appropriate. They then brainstorm reasons to support their position. To give students more opportunities to respond, Tanisha and Jacqueline divide the students into two groups, with each teacher facilitating one group. (Once the pandemic is over and it is safe for students to sit close to each other, they plan to pair students for "turn and talk" brainstorming.) In Tanisha's group, two students argue that 17-year-olds are responsible enough to vote because they had obtained drivers' licenses at age 16, and doing so demonstrated responsibility. As the students talk, Tanisha provides suggestions to help limit how many words they use during note taking. The students then choose the following words for their notes, "license shows responsibility."

To support three students whose graphic organizers are only partially completed, Jacqueline breaks a few of the group's ideas into more specific questions to improve their understanding of and participation in the task. For example, one student says her older brother, who is 17, has a job and that means he is responsible enough to vote; she then argues for being able to vote as soon as you get a job or turn 18, whichever comes first. To engage the three students in consid-

22 High-Leverage Practices for K–12 Teachers

Teaching is complex—and that's reflected in these 22 HLPs. The practices, and the four aspects of teaching and collaboration that organize them, are complementary, and teachers often use several at once. The practices also have some intentional redundancy; because feedback is essential for all aspects of students' learning, it appears in both the social/emotional/behavioral practices and in the instructional practices.

For details on each of these practices, including videos showing the practices in real classrooms and a professional development guide, visit highleveragepractices.org.

Collaboration

HLP 1: Collaborate with professionals to increase student success.
HLP 2: Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families.
HLP 3: Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services.

Assessment

HLP 4: Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs.
HLP 5: Interpret and communicate assessment information with stakeholders to collaboratively design and implement educational programs.
HLP 6: After special education teachers develop instructional goals, they evaluate and make ongoing adjustments to students' instructional programs.

Social/Emotional/Behavioral

HLP 7: Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment.
HLP 8: Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior.
HLP 9: Teach social behaviors.
HLP 10: Conduct functional behavioral assessments to develop individual student behavior support plans.

Instruction

HLP 11: Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals.
HLP 12: Systematically design instruction toward a specific learning goal.
HLP 13: Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals.
HLP 14: Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence.
HLP 15: Provide scaffolded supports.
HLP 16: Use explicit instruction.
HLP 17: Use flexible grouping.
HLP 18: Use strategies to promote active student engagement.
HLP 19: Use assistive and instructional technologies.
HLP 20: Provide intensive instruction.
HLP 21: Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings.
HLP 22: Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior.

–M. T. B., S. C., and M. J. K.

ering that assertion, Jacqueline asks a series of brief questions (starting with "Does having a job mean you are responsible?") and helps the students write their notes after each question. Once the class completes the graphic organizers, Jacqueline and Tanisha bring the whole class back together and provide feedback on ideas they generated. In their next planning period, they agree to create additional modeling and guided practice activities to help students learn how to generate text using ideas in their graphic organizers.

> ## Feedback reinforces students' efforts and prevents them from unintentionally learning incorrect information.

Promote student independence. Teachers gradually remove support during the guided practice phase and plan continued practice opportunities for students to increase their proficiency and their ability to apply what they have learned in new situations.[7] Independent practice activities vary in length and format (e.g., independent practice with solving mathematics word problems versus with writing chemistry lab reports), and include immediate and corrective feedback, a return to modeling as necessary, or additional examples and nonexamples if a review is warranted.

Tanisha and Jacqueline allot 30-minute periods spread over several days for independent practice. Students choose a topic to plan and compose a persuasive response. Topics include (1) whether the local government should install solar panels on government buildings, (2) whether the local library should add a computer lab or an art studio, and (3) which historical figure should be honored with a statue at a local park. Jacqueline conferences with students based on their needs. For instance, one student watches Jacqueline model and share examples of using transition words like *furthermore*, *another reason*, and *besides*

when introducing a new idea. Jacqueline teaches another student to improve his writing by using the thesaurus on his laptop. Noting that he used the word *obviously* twice in one paragraph, Jacqueline models using the thesaurus to choose a new word. He then practices using the thesaurus independently.

Importantly, Jacqueline and Tanisha recognize that some students benefit from ongoing review as the school year advances, including repeated modeling of the steps in writing persuasive essays and other instructional scaffolds. After several months, the process of using explicit instruction to specify how to use a graphic organizer for writing a persuasive essay resulted in increased performance and greater confidence among the students, including those with disabilities. When the students with disabilities used the graphic organizer combined with speech-to-text software to support their spelling and handwriting issues, their writing improved substantially.

Feedback

Feedback (HLP 8, under social/emotional/behavioral, and HLP 22, under instruction) is a powerful research-based practice teachers can use to improve students' learning and development—from understanding concepts to mastering skills to enhancing social interactions.[8] Feedback is a key feature of explicit instruction that occurs after a teacher has provided an opportunity to practice a concept, skill, or strategy that the teacher has modeled and explained. When used effectively, feedback can increase student motivation and effort toward a learning task and improve performance.

To be effective, teachers' feedback must be specific. Specific feedback incorporates these qualities:[9]

- Goal directed
- Constructive
- Immediate or timely
- Positive and respectful

Goal directed. Goal-directed feedback focuses on the academic or behavioral target students are working toward. The learning target should be important for student growth, based on assessment of student performance, explained to the student clearly, and, when possible, developed collaboratively with the student.

Two of Jacqueline's students have not yet been able to write a cohesive essay. To support them, she and the students are working toward writing strong, well-organized paragraphs that include a topic sentence and three to four supporting details. When providing feedback to one of her students, Sam, she notes he has developed a strong topic sentence because it introduces what the paragraph will be about, and he has two details that support it. Jacqueline also points out that the remaining two sentences contain details that are not related to the topic sentence and helps Sam generate two related details that he can write about. In addition to focusing on Sam's writing, Jacqueline tells him that he did a good job of working independently, a skill she has been trying to promote. Being more specific, Jacqueline tells Sam that she appreciates that he first asked his peers for ideas and also looked up information on the computer before asking her for help. She emphasizes that it will be important for Sam to continue to seek help on his own to continue growing as an independent learner.

Constructive. Constructive feedback helps students understand specific aspects of performance that are effective and specific aspects that need to be improved. In Jacqueline's work with Sam, she helps him understand what he has done to meet his learning and behavior targets—such as writing the topic sentence, adding two related details, and improving his work through independent strategies. Then, Jacqueline specifies what he needs to do to improve (replacing the unrelated details in his paragraph). Building on the initiative Sam took by trying to look up information on the computer, Jacqueline later follows up to help Sam learn more about online research. Such support and clarity usually motivate all students, especially those who have been struggling to learn.

Immediate or timely. Immediate feedback is ideal in supporting student learning, whether instruction is focused on academic content or behavior. For example, while Jacqueline is teaching a small group of students to capitalize proper nouns in their essays, she draws attention immediately to the students' errors. Jacqueline offers this real-time feedback in a helpful manner, with an encouraging tone, such as pointing to a lowercased name in a student's paragraph and asking what is missing. The same is true for improving behavior. Quickly pointing out that a student engaged in an appropriate behavior is a positive way to increase prosocial interactions. For instance, right after Marcel helped Sam with his writing, Jacqueline tells him that she liked how helpful he was being—and she notices over the next week that Marcel is more frequently helping other students in the class.

Immediate feedback is not always possible, especially in general education classrooms where teachers are working with a large group of students on tasks such as extended writing or applying a summary strategy while reading with their peers. In these instances, teachers will want to provide feedback as soon as possible.

For the general education students' persuasive essays, Tanisha chooses to provide written feedback on their long-term learning goals: organization, use of details, capitalization, and appropriate punctuation. Tanisha also provides written feedback when her students are honing their ability to summarize. Once her students are ready for independent practice, Tanisha has them underline the topic sentence and then highlight ideas that supported it before writing a 10- to 15-word summary. That approach gives Tanisha insights into the students' thinking, allowing her to provide written feedback on whether they were able to identify the topic sentence and related ideas before they write their summaries. It also helps Tanisha identify what additional instruction the students need (such as a repeated modeling lesson or additional background knowledge and vocabulary).

Positive and respectful. Positive and respectful feedback helps students feel that their efforts are worthwhile and appreciated by the teacher. Teachers should acknowledge students' efforts as well as their correct answers and prosocial behaviors. For instance, Jacqueline often tells students she notices they are working well with their peers to read a passage; she appreciates the way they are taking turns and praising each other for reading

Resources to Support Teachers

Teachers strive to help all their students achieve their potential academically and grow into caring, responsible community members. But schools rarely have the resources to meet students' needs—much less offer the enrichment all students deserve—and now the coronavirus pandemic is causing enormous social, emotional, and economic strains. As teachers seek to accelerate students' learning and promote positive interactions, they will find that engaging in explicit instruction and offering timely, supportive feedback are highly effective practices.

Explicit Instruction

- This video operationalizes the explicit instruction HLP. The video includes definitions of key components of explicit instruction and provides classroom examples: highleveragepractices.org/701-2.
- A companion to the book *Explicit Instruction* by Anita Archer and Charles Hughes, this website contains video exemplars and other resources to implement various elements of explicit instruction: explicitinstruction.org.
- These three videos illustrate how elements of explicit instruction and feedback are used to implement other HLPs and evidence-based practices:
  - HLP #18: Use Strategies to Promote Active Student Engagement, highleveragepractices.org/701-2-5.
  - HLP #7: Establish a Consistent, Organized, and Respectful Learning Environment, highleveragepractices.org/701-2-4-2-2.
  - HLP #17: Use Flexible Grouping, highleveragepractices.org/701-2-4-3-4.
- The National Center on Intensive Intervention offers online modules that schools can use for professional development in explicit instruction. The course includes activities that could serve as a review for experienced teachers or as a helpful starting guide for new educators: intensiveintervention.org/implementation-support/course-content.
- When teachers first start modeling, they often find it hard to think aloud in a clear, effective way while also demonstrating what they are doing. This video shows a teacher modeling a writing strategy using "self-talk" to promote regulating thoughts and behavior during a tricky learning task: youtube.com/watch?v=aVCUJiw7Ml8.

Providing Feedback

- This video is intended to operationalize feedback; it defines the components of effective feedback and provides examples of teachers using feedback to improve student performance: highleveragepractices.org/701-2-3.
- This video presents three teachers providing effective feedback in reading and writing. In these videos, you can see teachers providing different components of feedback, including timely feedback that is goal focused and constructive: youtube.com/watch?v=0DAeiBB6zT0.
- Showing two teachers providing effective feedback in reading and mathematics, this video is a great demonstration of teachers telling students what they did well and providing corrective feedback. The second teacher also uses feedback to help the student generate ways to improve: youtube.com/watch?v=mEgVL-nZqFg.

–M. T. B., S. C., and M. J. K.

carefully. Likewise, when students are decoding multisyllabic words but need additional help, Jacqueline is careful to focus on their efforts. She often makes remarks like, "Oh, that was an interesting way to sound out the word, let me show you what I would do."

To provide constructive feedback, it is most effective to focus only on what students did well and what they need to do to improve—and to avoid criticizing the quality of their efforts. For instance, when a student, Zara, gets stuck solving a word prob-lem, Jacqueline tells her that she did a fine job of reading the mathematics problem aloud and then paraphrasing the question; Jacqueline then reminds Zara that she would find it easier to solve the problem if she drew a picture representing it, as Jacqueline taught the class to do earlier that week. Seeing that Zara looks confused, Jacqueline remodels how to represent the problem in a picture.

These high-leverage practices provide an excellent road map for K–12 educators to consider when designing and implementing instruction for students with disabilities and others who need additional supports. Although all HLPs are important for teachers' tool belts, use of explicit instruction and feedback stand out as *must-have* practices to produce strong outcomes for the broadest possible range of students—including large numbers of students who have fallen behind as a result of the pandemic. As noted above, educators can use explicit instruction and feedback across the day to teach just about any content, and then give students positive, timely information about the extent to which they are meeting expectations. But explicit instruction and feedback are not standalone practices.

> Explicit instruction and feedback stand out as *must-have* practices to produce strong outcomes for the broadest range of students.

Systemic Support for Special Education
Making It a More Integral Part of General Teacher Preparation

BY MARY T. BROWNELL, LYNN HOLDHEIDE, MARGARET L. KAMMAN, AND ERICA D. McCRAY

Aditi is a first-year, eighth-grade social studies teacher. She's looking forward to honing her practice, but she's one of several new teachers hired just a couple of weeks before classes started. Perhaps not surpris-ingly, student achievement at this middle school has been far below the district and state averages for many years. Just in her first-period class, more than 50 percent of her 30 students are performing below proficient on the state assessments in reading and social studies, and seven of her students have documented disabilities. In her four other periods, achievement is similar, class sizes range from 26 to 32, and the numbers of students with disabilities range from five to seven.

Aditi is concerned because during her teacher preparation, she received little training and experience in working with students with disabilities. She believes students with disabilities would benefit from her class because they will have more opportunities to learn challenging curricu-lum and interact with their peers, but she feels unprepared to integrate effective strategies for these students in her instruc-tion or to leverage the expertise of her special education colleagues.

Experiences like Aditi's resemble those of many new teachers—but they shouldn't given the long-standing push to educate students with disabilities in inclusive environments. In 1975, Public Law 94-142 provided legislation guaranteeing a free appropriate education to each child with a disability in the least restrictive environ-ment. As of 2016, 63 percent of school-aged children served under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (formerly Public Law 94-142) were educated inside the general education classroom for at least 80 percent of the day.[1]

Inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms has been encouraged due to research showing benefits for students with disabilities and advocacy by the disability community. For instance, in a large-scale analysis of national achievement data, researchers found that time spent in general education predicted higher reading and mathematics achieve-ment for students with disabilities ages 6 through 9.[2] Further, students with disabili-ties who earned 80 percent or more of their high school credits in general education classrooms were far more likely to enroll and persist in postsecondary settings.[3] Inclusion promotes other nonacademic outcomes that enrich the quality of life students with disabilities experience in and out of school, such as friendships and improved social skills.[4]

Despite inclusion's benefits, the preparation of and support for teachers to educate students in inclusive environments has been insufficient. Research shows that general education teachers are often not

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To implement explicit instruction, teachers must also be able to establish consistent, organized, and respectful learning environments (HLP 7); otherwise, they will be unable to accomplish any instruction. They also must be able to identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals (HLP 11), if they are to focus their explicit instruction, and be able to promote active student engagement (HLP 18), if they are to create highly interactive instruction that helps students learn. Because all 22 HLPs reinforce each other but cannot be learned simultaneously, we recommend that educators looking for a logical entry point to adopt the HLPs begin with explicit instruction and feedback. These key practices serve as a strong foundation for other HLPs and are essential elements of many content-focused, research-based practices, such as teaching decoding in a systematic manner and encouraging positive behaviors. □

Endnotes

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prepared to teach students with disabilities and tend not to employ instructional practices that support the learning and social-emotional development of students with disabilities.[5] Fortunately, some progress has been made. For example, recent observation studies of reading instruction show that teachers' use of explicit phonics instruction and comprehension strategies has increased[6] (which empirical research has shown to improve the reading achievement of students with disabilities). Still, the field has a long way to go to help general education teachers learn to use research-based practices effectively.[7]

Teachers' lack of preparation to educate students with disabilities—and the overall lack of systemic support for excellence in special education—is reflected in the outcomes students with disabilities achieve. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress, average reading scores for fourth-grade students with disabilities have remained "below basic" since 1998. Average mathematics scores for fourth-graders with disabilities have hovered right around "basic" since 2003.[8] Outcomes for students with disabilities who are living in poverty or who speak a language other than English are even more dire.[9]

To reverse this trend, general education teachers must be knowledgeable about integrating research-based strategies for students with disabilities into their daily instruction and understand how to contextualize instructional practices to support student differences in language and culture. They also must be provided with the time, space, and materials to effectively collaborate with special education teachers, other professionals, and families to support the multifaceted needs that many students with disabilities exhibit. General and special education teachers clearly need a sophisticated set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to optimize learning in inclusive classrooms. Because this expertise cannot truly be cultivated in the relatively short time they spend in preparation programs, they will need access to coherent learning opportunities that extend beyond initial preparation well into their careers. In short, they need to participate in a professional learning system. □

Endnotes

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For a detailed discussion of this professional learning system—including changes that states, teacher preparation programs, and school districts need to collaboratively enact and examples of state teams starting to do this work—continue reading this article at go.aft.org/bhkm.

The **Power** of **"Screen Time"**

Harnessing It to Promote Language and Literacy Learning in Early Childhood and Elementary School

By Rebecca D. Silverman and Kristin Keane

"Screen time" has a rotten reputation. Though it is ubiquitous in children's lives, research suggests it can have a negative impact on child development.[1] For example, recent studies show that increased screen use (such as watching television, playing video games, or surfing online) is associated with lower scores on measures of language and literacy in preschool;[2] and in elementary school, as access to and use of digital media increases, so do difficulties with academics and behavior.[3]

Headlines about the negative effects of screen time may alarm teachers and cause them to worry about using digital media with early childhood and elementary school students.[4] However, the relationship between digital media use and language and literacy learning is complex, and there are, in fact, arguments both *for* and *against* the use of digital media in education.

These benefits and drawbacks are important to understand now more than ever. After the coronavirus pandemic forced almost all schools in the United States to close in the spring, educators quickly pivoted to remote learning. Teachers and families are concerned about children's screen time—and about how to most effectively create and use digital materials. Although we are all hoping for the virus to abate and for students to learn in school, we also know that, until there is a vaccine, digital media will likely play a significant role in instruction. Because language and literacy development are crucial to all other learning, we focus on helping educators maximize that development using screens.*

Digital media is a broad term describing content that is delivered through technology; it can include text, images, audio, animations, video, and interactives. On the one hand, digital media with abundant sights and sounds may reduce children's learning by overtaxing their ability to selectively attend to and process important information.[5] On the other hand, digital media with more focused and coherent verbal and nonverbal representations of the content may support children's acquisition and retention of that information.[6]

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*Although remote instruction without the benefit of digital media is outside the scope of this article, we extend our heartfelt thanks to teachers across the country who have dedicated countless hours to creating paper instructional packets and calling students (and their families) who lack adequate internet access or computer equipment at home. We also wish to thank the many advocates working to right the wrong that is the digital divide.

For example, consider building relevant knowledge and vocabulary to support comprehension of expository text on a topic such as coral reefs. Sharing an animated video of a fish singing about coral reefs and dancing along to the music may distract children's attention from the topic and leave children with an unclear understanding of coral reefs. However, using a live-action video of plants and animals in a coral reef swaying gently to the rhythm of the waves accompanied by a clear explanation of what coral reefs are and what kinds of plants and animals live on coral reefs may actually help children learn about this habitat.

In fact, research suggests the effect of digital media on children's language and literacy learning may depend on a number of factors, including the presentation of the content, the context of the digital media use, and the ages and backgrounds of the children.[7] Given the complexity of the research findings, we have distilled several guiding principles to help educators harness the power of screen time to promote (not hinder) language and literacy learning.

Before we dive into these principles, it is important to note that research on using digital media to support language and literacy is still nascent. Much more research across a variety of contexts is needed to understand what works, for whom, and under what conditions. The research we present here provides some initial indications on the types of digital media use that may be helpful in supporting language and literacy, but we encourage researchers to engage in more study of this topic (and policymakers and practitioners to support this research) so that the findings grow more robust and informative.

Digital Media Can Enhance Instruction

While digital media could never replace interaction with a teacher, it can enhance instruction. One way to do this is to identify digital media that can help to reinforce or provide practice with skills or concepts teachers are targeting. For example, in one study with kindergartners from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, instruction focused their attention on the sounds of words in the text.[8] Children used e-books that included text to speech, highlighted words, and interactive "hot spots" that could be activated by clicking characters, objects, or words appearing in the text. To ensure distractions were kept to a minimum, hot spots could not be clicked until the narration ended.

Character or object hot spots activated dialogue or sound effects that could enrich story comprehension. Hot spots on words promoted word recognition and phonological awareness[†] by having the narrator divide the word into syllables. Importantly, the e-books aligned with instruction and did not include irrelevant information that would detract from targeted early literacy skills. Findings showed that children grew in their understanding of concepts about print, word reading, and phonological awareness.

A similar study combined teachers' instruction and digital media use within a curriculum to promote preschoolers' vocabulary and conceptual development.[9] Teachers used a video from either *Sesame Street* or *Elmo's World* to introduce information about conceptual categories such as healthy foods and wild animals. To help strengthen children's understanding, researchers chose clips to pair visual information with verbal information. For

example, when focusing on insects, a video provided students with a definition and description of the category and showed a katydid, which served as a prototypical example. Teacher-led discussion about the video then followed, as did a read-aloud[‡] of an informational book on the same topic. Throughout the insect unit, the discussion focused on features of insects, and the books for the read-alouds reviewed the words and concepts introduced (e.g., antennae). As in the e-book study, the information in the videos aligned with the information in the read-alouds and provided an opportunity for children to learn about the topics across multiple contexts. The result was increased vocabulary and conceptual knowledge.

> Providing content in multiple ways, and providing a more representative assortment of content, can be enriching for all students.

Web-based digital media programs that align with instruction may also be helpful. In one study, researchers worked with teachers and children in K–2 classrooms across Canada to study the use of a free, web-based digital media program called ABRACADABRA (literacy.concordia.ca/abra/en) that includes modules focused on aspects of reading (letters and sounds, fluency, comprehension, and writing/spelling).[10] Teachers were encouraged to integrate the web-based program with their regular language arts instruction. For example, after children engaged with a digital story on fruit, teachers might ask them to draw and label or write about the fruits they eat. Incorporating multimedia into teachers' language arts instruction provided children with additional support for their language and literacy skills. In this study—as well as several other studies of the program across the world—children whose teachers used the program performed better on early literacy tasks such as phonological blending and letter-sound recognition.

Other studies have found that closed captioning and highlighted text spoken by a narrator are associated with improving word recognition skills.[11] Synchronizing text and speech likely facilitates children's ability to connect letters with sounds in the words they are learning to read. In addition, videos, e-books, and other digital tools that have rich content with illustrations and animations aligned with dialogue or narration have shown positive effects on vocabulary and comprehension, likely because the illustrations and animations were directly related

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[†]For more on phonological awareness, see "Teaching Reading *Is* Rocket Science" in the Summer 2020 issue of *American Educator*: aft.org/ae/summer2020/moats.

[‡]For more on the power of read-alouds, see "Reading to Learn from the Start" in the Winter 2018–2019 issue of *American Educator*: aft.org/ae/winter2018-2019/wright.

Digital tools can address multiple instructional objectives at once as long as they are included purposefully.

to the content and therefore supported visual and auditory processing of the information.[12]

Digital tools can address multiple instructional objectives at once as long as they are included purposefully (not tangentially). For example, carefully crafted e-books for kindergartners and first-graders included segmented speech to support phonological awareness, highlighted text to support word recognition, oral reading to support fluency, visuals of particular words to support vocabulary, and dramatization with action and music intended to facilitate comprehension.[13] These books helped children make significant gains in word reading and vocabulary. Note that these features were intentionally chosen to facilitate specific literacy skills. As a counterpoint, consider fairy tale e-books that allow children to click on irrelevant hot spots during story narration (e.g., opening and closing a window on a page when Little Red Riding Hood's mother is asking her to bring her sick grandmother some treats). By letting children play unrelated games on each page (e.g., "painting" the scene from the story) or, worse, showing them advertisements, such e-books likely detract from children's learning.

In using specific digital media tools, educators may consider the following guiding questions:

- Does this digital media tool support the skills or concepts I am trying to teach and align with the way I am teaching them?
- Does this tool intentionally present the most important content in complementary visual and verbal ways?
- Is this digital media tool free from distractions that could diminish the learning of skills or concepts I am trying to teach?

Digital Media Can Support Equity and Inclusion

Providing content in multiple ways, and providing a more diverse and representative assortment of content, can be enriching for all students and may be especially so for children from racial, ethnic, and cultural groups that are not appropriately represented in many books and curricula and for children with a range of strengths and needs who have been marginalized all too often.[14] For example, digital media that is culturally sustaining may promote the language and literacy of students from underrepresented backgrounds. In one study, a researcher examined the benefits of two programs designed to help children use oracy as a scaffold when reading and writing.[15] All students who used the programs showed gains in word recognition, but gains were greater for African American students. The researcher theorized that positive effects for African American students likely resulted from the way the programs drew on African American culture and music to foster reading and writing development.

Research suggests that digital media may support the language and literacy development of children who are learning English as well. A study in which prekindergarten through second-grade children learned about habitats (e.g., ocean, desert, savannah, rainforest) offered content either through read-alouds alone or through read-alouds plus videos.[16] The video clips, carefully chosen from National Geographic content, provided real-life footage of the habitats in the texts. With the book and video combination, English learners increased their habitat-specific and general vocabulary knowledge, likely because combining visual and verbal information helped children learning English process the new words and content.

In another example, researchers studied the vocabulary and comprehension of English monolingual and Spanish-English bilingual students in upper elementary school who used an online strategic reading intervention that included text-to-speech supports and hypertext definitions, as well as translation from English to Spanish.[17] There were positive effects on English vocabulary for all students, and Spanish-English bilingual students developed their English vocabulary at the same rate as their monolingual peers. The authors suggest that multimedia features—such as text to speech, definitions, and translation—were particularly helpful for the bilingual students in the study.

Children with disabilities may also benefit from experiences with carefully selected digital media. A study of scaffolds for K–2 students with intellectual disabilities used e-books and letter- and word-recognition software that were designed to offer appropriate challenge and engagement.[18] Scaffolds included videos to build background knowledge, hyperlinks to definitions that included graphics and multimedia illustrations, story enhancements such as being able to click on characters to hear what they are thinking or feeling, models of comprehension strategies and prompts to apply them, and varied response strategies (e.g., multiple choice, sentence starters, and open responses that could be typed or audio recorded). After using the software over the course of an academic year, children outperformed comparable peers who did not use the program in concepts about print, word attack skills, and reading comprehension.

In another study using e-books to support the language and literacy of K–5 children with developmental disabilities,[19] chil-

dren participated in an intervention that included tablet-based multimedia books featuring real-life photographs and videos along with text to support science vocabulary learning. The students learned the taught words and retained their knowledge of them over time. In both studies, using digital media to focus attention, provide scaffolds, and offer concrete and relevant examples and opportunities for practice likely contributed to positive effects.

To help teachers choose the appropriate multimedia to provide a more equitable and inclusive environment for all children, here are a few guiding questions:

- Is the digital media content culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining for the specific students in my classroom?
- Does the digital media tool offer authentic ways for students to build on their strengths and thereby build bridges to addressing their needs?
- Does the digital media tool include supports for students who are learning English (e.g., definitions, scaffolds for comprehension, and translations) and/or students with disabilities (e.g., appropriately challenging and engaging content with embedded scaffolds to facilitate access)?

Digital Media Can Promote Engagement and Motivation

Digital media can be used to provide opportunities for self-directed learning, to tap into students' interests, and to promote collaboration among peers, all of which support engagement and motivation. In one study that aimed to increase engagement and motivation while connecting museums and schools, children worked together to use information they collected to design short interactive multimedia presentations with collaborative authoring tools.[20] Children engaged in a wide range of learner-driven language and literacy activities (e.g., selecting and evaluating information sources and transforming and communicating knowledge in a variety of formats) and worked with others to prepare and present what they learned. Teachers reported that students' engagement, motivation, and learning increased.

Using digital media to provide opportunities for collaboration may be especially effective. For example, researchers conducted a study comparing the learning of kindergartners randomly assigned to use e-books in pairs or individually with the learning of children in a control condition.[21] While all children who interacted with e-books outperformed control children, children who were in pairs learned more about phonological awareness, emergent reading, and story comprehension than children in the individual learning condition.

In another study, researchers used e-books in a cross-age peer "buddies" learning program.[22] Older buddies in fourth grade and younger buddies in kindergarten—many of whom were learning English—interacted with print books, videos, and e-books in an intervention focused on promoting vocabulary and comprehension. The use of different types of media was intended to increase engagement and expose buddies to different types of text related to the same content. In vocabulary, older and younger buddies participating in the intervention outperformed children who did not participate; older buddies also outperformed nonintervention students in comprehension.

Importantly, in both of these e-book studies, children were provided with instruction and support to learn how to use the digital tools together in a collaborative and supportive way.[23] Teachers focused on everything from how to use the device and take turns with it to how to pause and discuss the content at critical points. Without such modeling and guidance, children might focus on the bells and whistles of the digital tools instead of using them to more deeply interact with and discuss the content.[24] For example, in the cross-age buddies learning mentioned above, when children spent more time clicking hyperlinks and interactives in an e-book, they had less rich conversations about text and spent less time asking and answering questions about the text together. Teacher guidance on how to use such digital tools appropriately can go a long way toward making them effective.

Without modeling and guidance, children might focus on the bells and whistles.

When considering digital media to support engagement and motivation, teachers might consider asking:

- Does this digital media tool promote engagement and motivation in literacy activities without distracting students from what they need to learn?
- Does this digital media tool support student-driven learning in a well-curated context (such as the museum example above) that keeps children engaged in important content as they explore?
- Does this digital media tool foster meaningful collaboration and interaction among peers?

Digital Media Can Leverage Home-School Connections

Access to multimedia in many schools and homes provides an exciting mechanism for student knowledge building and connection between these two spaces. On average, children who are 0 to 5 years old spend about three hours each day on screens; by 8 to 12 years old, screen use is nearly five hours a day (not including school or homework).[25] Whether this time is beneficial or detrimental to their language and literacy development depends in large part on the content of the multimedia they access and the amount of parental support they receive while using it.[26] Teachers can help ensure this time is infused with learning opportunities by working with families to access educational content aligned with literacy learning goals at home.

There are many ways teachers can help bridge home and school through the use of multimedia. One strategy is to share what children are learning in school via blog posts and videos.[27] At home, parents can view these by themselves or with their children and then reinforce the same knowledge and skills, providing children with more opportunities for practice and support. An example of a more formal approach to bridging school

Bringing home cultures into school supports children's engagement in literacy learning.

and home learning through multimedia and intentional parent engagement is an intervention in which teachers were provided with professional development on using nursery rhymes to support the literacy development of kindergartners from low-income backgrounds. Children in these teachers' classrooms were provided with videos of the nursery rhymes to later watch with adults at home, and family workshops were held to demonstrate ways of using the videos for educational purposes, such as having children read the text on the screen with an adult. Results from the study showed participating children improved in vocabulary and even outperformed their peers in reading in third grade.

Connecting home and school should not be a one-way street. Bringing home cultures and experiences into school supports children's engagement in language and literacy learning.[28] For example, in one study, teachers worked with third- and fourth-graders to develop digital texts such as blog posts,

A Purposeful Use of Digital Media Tools

To illustrate how teachers might consider using digital media tools to support language and literacy, we highlight the work of Ms. Edwards, a second-grade teacher. During a unit on life cycles, she begins the day by gathering students on the carpet for a read-aloud. She previews vocabulary words using a PowerPoint presentation that includes definitions, examples, and pictures of target words, such as *pollinate*, *germinate*, and *reproduce*. She knows pairing the definitions and the pictures will help her students' understanding. Her PowerPoint includes links to the Spanish translations of the words to help the several children in her class who speak Spanish at home develop their academic Spanish vocabulary and to reinforce the benefits of bilingualism for the whole class. Ms. Edwards then reads her class *From Seed to Plant* by Gail Gibbons, which is available in Spanish as an e-book in the class library for children and their families. Afterward, she shows students a time-lapse video of a plant life cycle (see bit.ly/2AXT5mY) and guides students in discussing connections between the book and video.

Later that day, Ms. Edwards introduces an extension activity. Students will work in groups using tablets to research the life cycle of a particular plant and collaboratively create presentations using Google Slides to show what they learned. Ms. Edwards has provided students links to relevant, appropriate content on Newsela.com, which enables students to access more or less challenging texts that are carefully crafted

to address the same topics. To support students' research and writing, she meets with each group separately. She also takes videos and pictures documenting what students are creating so she can send these to families at the end of the day using Seesaw, a remote learning platform.

Ms. Edwards continues the unit on life cycles during her reading groups and centers. While Ms. Edwards meets with each group, the other students rotate through three centers where they

- read about plants and life cycles with e-books or paper books;
- use an app that explains the life cycles of 10 different plants with illustrations, text, and interactives, and then draw their own representations on paper or using a whiteboard app; or
- watch and discuss with a partner a BrainPOP Jr. module on plants that includes videos and closed captioning.

At the end of each center rotation, Ms. Edwards asks children to complete a quick check-in via a polling app, which allows her to see what children were working on as well as what they found helpful or challenging.

Ms. Edwards asks students to extend their learning at home by adding to the class blog one thing they learned about the plant life cycle that day (which Ms. Edwards will use to start a class discussion the next morning and to plan lessons for later in the unit). She also texts her students' parents to encourage them to check out their children's work on Seesaw and to ask their

children about the plant life cycles they are investigating. She sends a list of links to suggested websites, e-books, and apps that parents could use to support their children in studying the topic at home. Ms. Edwards invites family members to text or call with questions or concerns that they may have about their children's progress or how to extend their learning at home. Parents often send pictures, voice messages, or texts of their family doing home-school connection activities, and she shares many of these in class.

Ms. Edwards has put a great deal of time into finding high-quality, supportive, and engaging (but not distracting) resources for her students and their families. Not every tool she tries out is a winner, but overall she finds the time she invests is well worth the benefits for her students' language and literacy learning.

–R. D. S. and K. K.

podcasts, short documentaries, web profiles, digital stories, and online comics that showcased their home and community lives as well as their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.[29] Building meaningful connections with students' homes and communities through the curriculum can help build on children's prior knowledge, show that they are valued, and tap into their personal interests to leverage engagement in language and literacy instruction.

In searching for digital media tools to promote home-school connections, teachers might consider the following:

- Does this digital media tool promote communication, connection, and collaboration with families?
- Does this digital media tool align with the curriculum such that it strengthens families' ability to support and extend what students are learning in class?
- Does this digital media tool encourage children and their families to build on and share their knowledge, perspectives, and cultures in ways that are responsive for each child and enriching for the whole class?

Teachers are already critical consumers of media aiming to make careful choices about digital media to support their instruction. As digital media becomes ever more prevalent in schools and at home, and especially as the pandemic makes the need to maximize learning even more urgent, we hope the research reviewed here helps teachers consider the affordances or drawbacks of digital content and tools.

One helpful way of categorizing the features of digital resources contrasts "considerate" (supportive and instructive) versus "inconsiderate" (distracting and obtrusive).[30] Considerate features of language and literacy resources include embedded and relevant definitions, pronunciations, translations, comprehension prompts, and text to speech; inconsiderate features include unrelated nontext, distracting hypermedia links, and extraneous hot spots (i.e., pop-ups). Using the guiding questions we provide in this article, teachers may want to determine whether specific digital media tools are considerate and therefore potentially supportive of children's language and

literacy development.* Ultimately, educators must use their professional judgment—and knowledge of the latest research on digital media—to choose the best resources to support their students' language and literacy learning. □

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*To find reviews of specific digital resources, visit commonsense.org/education/search?contentType=reviews. However, keep in mind that technology changes so fast, it is hard for any organization to keep up with the latest multimedia options; unfortunately, researchers can't mobilize quickly enough to provide high-quality evidence on the effectiveness of most tools on the market.

The **Fraught Debate** Over **Reopening Schools**
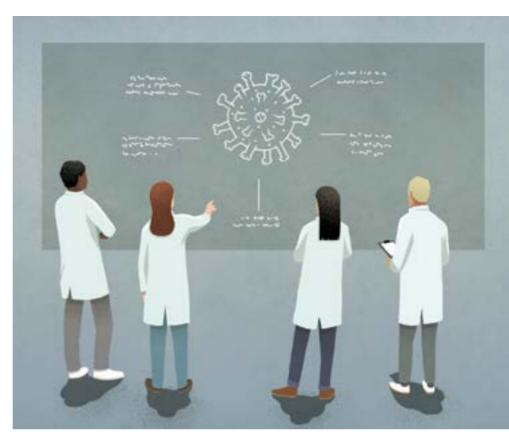
And the Need to Focus on Science

BY RACHEL M. COHEN

Many families are desperate to get their kids back to school, and many political leaders agree, worried about harm to children's educations and believing that key to fixing the economy is making it easier for parents to work. But the pandemic, which is still raging, has led to one of the most politicized and divisive debates in America: Can we safely reopen schools?

The go-to academic on this question has become Emily Oster, a prominent economist at Brown University. Oster doesn't have a background in public health, but over the last decade she has earned a reputation as a data-driven, empathetic, and trusted parenting expert. Since March, she's been helping families navigate questions around school reopenings, giving numerous interviews, and writing op-eds.

Oster tells her audiences that she's using data to help inform the best decisions possible, though at times she's adopted more explicit advocacy on the need to reopen schools. Occasionally, she has downplayed negative research findings that complicate the picture, and amplified studies that experts say were weak.

Rachel M. Cohen is a journalist based in Washington, DC, and a former American Prospect *writing fellow. Adapted with permission from "Why Reopening Schools Has Become the Most Fraught Debate of the Pandemic," © The American Prospect,* Prospect.org, *2020. All rights reserved. The original article, which makes a much more detailed argument, is available at bit.ly/3kFGSWf.*

In late July, when a study[1] came out that suggested children with COVID-19 have a higher viral load than adults, Oster quickly wrote a piece saying it would be a "very big leap" to apply these findings to school reopening discussions.[2] Instead, she urged focus on a large South Korea contact tracing study, which suggested younger children transmitted the virus in their households at a lower rate than other groups.[3] A month later, the leaders for that South Korea study said it wasn't really clear who infected whom in the households, and called for further research.[4] Even today, how effectively children transmit the virus to others remains one of the fuzziest, and most pressing, questions.

In late August, Oster announced a new project of "systematic data collection and reporting" on COVID-19 in schools.[5] With a public desperate to return to normalcy and school reopening at the forefront of that, it didn't take long for national outlets to start reporting Oster's data. These stories clearly suggested that COVID-19 infections in schools were few and far between. But they also reflected an extremely small and unrepresentative sample of schools.

Oster acknowledged that more data would be needed to understand what was going on in areas with high transmission, but she made no mention that students are still getting tested at significantly lower levels than adults, and that many schools have no requirement for even symptomatic students to be tested. Nevertheless, her findings were soon echoed by influential media figures. When some public health experts offered objections and reason for skepticism,[6] the media establishment either ignored them or cast them as liberal hysterics. In fact, anyone who objected must be unreasonably searching for a world where *zero risk* exists. This is a straw man, of course, but an effective one—and one easily found in many articles about school reopenings.

Oster told me in late October they're working to make their dataset "more representative" and conceded that those who opted to voluntarily report tended to be a "higher-income sample, and more suburban." This work-in-progress dataset wouldn't be such a concern if Oster wasn't disseminating broad conclusions based upon it throughout the fall. In a *Wall Street Journal* article published in October, Oster told the reporter that her data "suggests the risks to kids from going to school are small."[7]

Rebekah Jones, a former Florida Department of Health data scientist who says she

was fired in May over a refusal to manipulate her state's COVID-19 stats, has publicly pushed back on Oster's claims.[8] Over the summer, Jones launched her own national tracker of school coronavirus cases called COVID Monitor.[9] It's run in partnership with Google and FinMango, a financial-literacy nonprofit. By the end of October, it had data from nearly 4,000 school districts, over 26 times the number in Oster's dataset. Oster approached Jones's team in August about potentially collaborating, and they offered Oster full and free access to their data. "But she basically decided to just pick what data she wanted, not what's available," says Jones.

Things came to a head following a viral *Atlantic* piece Oster published early in October, with the controversial headline "Schools Aren't Super-Spreaders."[10] While surveys of parents have shown reticence to schools reopening, especially among parents of color,[11] Oster chalked up slower reopenings to "fear and bad press." Her piece said nothing about low in-person attendance rates for districts that have reopened, the lag time in reporting, and the persistent inadequacy in testing and tracing school-related cases. It also didn't mention the major public health fear that transmission could change as the weather gets colder. It made no mention of the fact that children then made up 10 percent of all COVID-19 cases in the US, up from 2 percent in April.[12] Oster's story also said nothing about race. Black[13] and Latino[14] communities have been contracting COVID and dying of it at higher rates, and while Oster targeted Chicago, Los Angeles, and Houston specifically for not reopening schools, there was no mention that these cities have higher concentrations of Black and Latino families.

A study published in mid-September estimated that up to 44 million high-risk adults in the US either work in schools or have school-aged children.[15] "You can have a low overall positivity rate and it still be a place where you don't want to open schools because it will further the health disparities and minority children will be at greater risk," says Theresa Chapple, an applied epidemiologist who focuses on child and maternal health.

Chapple thinks many leading the conversation have lost sight of the goal, which is to reduce the rate of the coronavirus in the community. "If opening schools is adding to community transmission, then we're fighting a harder battle, even if we raise transmission by a tenth of a point," she says. "People don't want to come out and say they're OK with others dying, so instead they just cite a small percentage number and avoid talking about what that actually translates to for people, families, and communities."

Public health groups that initially made firmer declarations about the safety of kids and coronavirus have since tamped down their statements. One of the most prominent is the American Academy of Pediatrics, which made waves in late June when it issued strongly worded guidance urging schools to open for in-person learning, and stating that "the preponderance of evidence indicates that children ... may be less likely to become infected and ... to spread infection."[16] In August, the association updated its guidance to say more research is needed to understand infectivity and transmissibility in children, and that opening schools to all students is "likely not feasible" in many places because of community spread.[17]

In late August, Laura Garabedian, a professor of population medicine at Harvard Medical School, and Rebecca Haffajee, a health policy researcher at RAND, coauthored an op-ed in *USA Today* on the limitations of existing studies that had suggested children could transmit less COVID-19 than adults.[18] Both are parents in the Boston suburbs, and after attending Zoom meetings to learn about their schools' plans for reopening, they realized quickly that leaders were making decisions based on shaky research.

In a joint interview, Garabedian and Haffajee said that in places where schools quickly test, contact trace, and impose measures like mask wearing, upgraded ventilation, and social distancing, reopenings seem to be working. But they acknowledged that not all communities have the resources to put those mitigation strategies in place, and they wonder what will happen in places where community rates rise, and contact tracing becomes overwhelmed. The researchers said we also have no clear idea of what would result if schools were again doing in-person learning at full capacity, which is happening in few places in the US.

Research has long shown that in-person instruction is better for children. The nation's inequitable access to broadband internet has made virtual learning even harder for millions of families to access,[19] and the fact that bars and restaurants remained open throughout the fall while schools were closed was a staggering political choice.[20]

> ## How effectively children transmit the virus remains one of the fuzziest, and most pressing, questions.

Still, many adults work in schools, and illness and death can set back kids, too. If children infect their parents, teachers, or neighbors, or spend time in school anxious that they might, experts warn that too could yield harm. "Children are not the only ones at school," says Chapple. "We do not know the impact that infected children can have on our vulnerable populations. The conversation can't just be about children, it has to be about children and communities." □

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Ensuring American Indian Students Receive an Equitable, Just, and Appropriate Education

A Matter of Personal and Professional Concern

Alicia Strawn, a first-grade teacher at Heronville Elementary in Oklahoma City, reads *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush* by Tomie dePaola as part of a lesson to celebrate Native American culture in 2019.

By Susan C. Faircloth

As an American Indian woman, parent, educator, and scholar, I find myself grappling with the question of how to ensure American Indian children receive an equitable, just, and appropriate education. I know firsthand the detrimental effects of not having American Indian (also referred to as Native) teachers or school leaders, of learning history from a non-Native perspective, and of feeling as if the educational system did not see my talents nor take the time to ask me about my dreams and aspirations. As the parent of an elementary-age Native student, I want a different experience for my child and for others like her—an educational experience that sees and values not only our children, but also our cultures, languages, and stories.

The creation of culturally and academically affirming schools for Native children requires us, as educators, to ask ourselves some difficult questions: Are we confronting the racism that American Indi-

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ans continue to face and preparing our students to do the same? Are we recognizing the gifts and talents of American Indian students, not simply seeing their struggles? Are we working to recruit Native teachers and ensuring they receive the support and preparation to become leaders within our schools? And are we working to recognize, honor, and incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, learning, valuing, thinking, and being into our teaching?[1]

Honest answers to these questions will provide us a sense of where we are in our readiness and willingness to engage in the education of Native youth. For many of us, this will require us to unlearn or, at a minimum, challenge much of what we learned in our educator preparation and professional development programs.* For others, it will mean opening our hearts and minds to new learnings about this nation's first peoples and the role that the formal education system has played in the tragic taking of Native languages, cultures, and lands. Regardless of where we are in this process, I hope we will all come to recognize and honor the resilient nature of Native peoples; in spite of sustained attempts at assimilation and acculturation, Native peoples are surviving, and in many cases, thriving.

*For more on the need to build cultural and racial awareness for instructional practice, see "Race to Improve Teacher Education" in the Fall 2019 issue of *American Educator*: aft.org/ae/fall2019/milner.

At the core of this survival is Native peoples' recognition of education as a potentially powerful tool for increasing tribal self-determination and for reclaiming and sustaining our Indigenous languages, cultures, traditions, and lifeways. As professor Leilani Sabzalian writes, "Native courage, creativity, intelligence, determination, and artfulness—acts of Native survivance—are our inheritance and our legacy as Indigenous peoples."[2]

Becoming an Educator

As a member of the Coharie Tribe, one of eight American Indian tribes in the state of North Carolina,[†] I was conscious from an early age of the racial and cultural divide that set me, and my community, apart from many of my peers. Much of my understanding of this difference was tied to my parents' telling and retelling of their experiences growing up in the rural South during a period of legalized segregation—a period in which my father was fit enough to serve his country in Vietnam yet unable to dine in a restaurant with my mother.

My parents grew up economically poor but culturally rich. They were among the first in our tribe to graduate from East Carolina Indian School (also known as Eastern Carolina Indian School). Prior to the opening of this elementary and secondary school under the leadership of tribal elders in the 1940s, members of my tribe were forced to make a decision: either conclude their formal education at the eighth grade or leave the community to pursue a high school education in another part of the state. East Carolina Indian School was forced to close in the 1960s due to the integration of the local school system. This loss is still deeply felt and discussed among those who attended and taught at the school.

As a young child, I often returned to this school building, which was converted into our tribal headquarters, with my parents to attend tribal gatherings and cultural events. Each time we entered the school grounds, my parents would recall their childhood memories and reconnect to their past. Although the school lacked a cafeteria and other modern facilities, it was a place in which students, teachers, and community members felt at home. It was their school, and it was evident that they were proud of what they were able to achieve through its creation. The closure of the school marked an end of an era in which the local tribal community was intimately involved in shaping and delivering the formal education of its people.

In contrast to my parents, I attended integrated public schools in which Native students were in the minority. With the exception of a federally funded Indian Education Program,[‡] which provided cultural enrichment and academic support services for American Indian students, my exposure to Native educators was limited. As a result, it was difficult for me to see my culture, traditions, or history reflected in the curriculum. Although I was labeled as academically gifted and excelled on standardized assessments, I never quite fit in, nor did I feel that my teachers, with a few exceptions, saw my true potential. In spite of this, I went on to graduate

[†]For more information regarding the tribes of North Carolina, see ncadmin.nc.gov/public/american-indians.
[‡]For more information regarding the federal Indian Education Program, see oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-indian-education.

from high school and college. Returning home from college with no immediate source of employment, my parents encouraged me to pursue a teaching degree. The more they encouraged me, the more I resisted. In the back of my mind, I could not reconcile my own educational experiences with a career as a teacher. Thankfully, I eventually found my calling as an educator and scholar of Indigenous education.

Over the years, I came to realize that what Native students need most is a sense of belonging and care in schools. They need to see people who look and sound like them and who understand where they come from. They need teachers and school leaders who hold high expectations for them and recognize that these expectations can be met without sacrificing their sense of cultural identity. They need a rich curriculum that provides both mirrors and windows—a curriculum that reflects their heritage and honors Native knowledge and ways of knowing; that expands their understanding of other peoples, events, and ideas;[3] and that explores the intersection of other peoples, events, and ideas with their lives as Native peoples. Not only do they need these things, they have a right to them.

> What Native students need most is a sense of belonging and care in schools. High expectations can be met without sacrificing cultural identity.

I first learned about the need for more culturally relevant teaching and learning practices through my own lived experience as an American Indian student in a predominantly white school system. Years later, a deeper understanding of this need was developed through my work in K–12 schools where I helped develop culturally relevant programs in an urban Indian Education Program. Subsequently, I pursued graduate-level education in American Indian education through the American Indian Leadership Program at Penn State. Each of these experiences strengthened my commitment to ensuring that future generations of Native children did not feel the sense of exclusion and devaluing that marked much of my schooling. As a scholar of Indigenous education, I have used my work as a means of advocating for Indigenous children and youth and helping to change the ways in which we prepare future generations of teachers and school leaders. To that end, for the past 20 years, I have researched and written about the educational conditions and subsequent outcomes of Native children. (For more on the history of educating Native students, see the sidebar on page 30.) I have also helped to prepare Native and non-Native educators and school leaders to act in more culturally appropriate and responsive ways. Yet, there is still much to be done.

Becoming a Mother

For much of this time, I have approached this work from the perspective of an auntie to my niece, whose name translates

The Education of American Indian Students

A Brief History

The horrific treatment of Native peoples is a stain on our nation's history—and on our present and future. The legacy of oppression, combined with current widespread lack of knowledge about Native peoples, contributes to vast inequities today. Fortunately, where ignorance is core to this problem, excellent teaching is essential to its remedy. Here, I answer four key questions about the education of Native students and the challenges that remain.

How Has Federal Indian Education Policy Been Shaped?

Throughout the history of the United States, a number of different eras have defined the federal government's policies toward American Indian peoples, which in turn has shaped the ways in which the federal government approaches Indian education. From the late 1700s until the early 1800s, the federal government established treaties with Indian tribes. In most of these treaties, tribes ceded land to the federal government in exchange for the provision of health, education, and welfare for American Indian peoples. Unfortunately, the federal government has repeatedly failed to honor the provisions outlined in many of these treaties, including the provision of educational supports and services. A prime example of this is evidenced in the operation of off-reservation boarding schools during the 1800s.

Although many of these schools were rightly characterized by some as "oppressive, harshly abusive, and rigid,"[1] it has also been argued[2] that Colonel Richard Henry Pratt, founder of one of the most well-known off-reservation boarding schools, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, viewed these institutions as a means of preventing the wide-scale killing of Native peoples at the hands of the US government and its military forces. Regardless of the intent of boarding schools, there is evidence to suggest that such an approach not only resulted in forced acculturation and assimilation of many Native children but also resulted in the physical separation of Native children from their families and, in many cases, death.

Unfortunately, it was not until the 1960s that tribes began to reclaim some degree of control over the education of Native children and youth.

In 1969, the US Senate issued a report titled *Indian Education: A National*

Older students at Carlisle Indian Industrial School taking a class in government in 1901.

Tragedy—A National Challenge (also known as the Kennedy Report).[3] Citing the failure of public schools, as well as schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to adequately educate American Indian children, this report found high dropout rates, academic achievement significantly lagging behind that of white students, a lack of American Indian teachers and principals, and a low sense of academic ability among some Native children.

Such problems were documented long before the Senate's report. Dating back to the federally commissioned Meriam Report of 1928, there were calls to immediately address a number of concerns across Indian country. The Meriam Report found that, "The most fundamental need in Indian education is a change in point of view. Whatever may have been the official government attitude, education for the Indian in the past has proceeded largely on the theory that it is necessary to remove the Indian child as far as possible from his home environment."[4] This report went on to argue that, "The Indian educational program cannot simply take over the traditional type of school; it must set up its own objectives, finding out in general and for each reservation or tribal group the things that need to be done. It cannot too positively be stated that mere schooling, of the unrelated academic type, is not the educational answer to the Indian problem."[5]

Findings of the Meriam Report were echoed in a 1974 report by the National Advisory Council on Indian Education, which argued, "There are no quick and easy

> Boarding schools resulted in forced acculturation of many Native children, separation of Native children from their families, and, in many cases, death.

solutions in this tragic state of affairs; but clearly, effective education lies at the heart of any lasting solution."[6] This council went on to argue "that education should no longer be one which assumes that cultural differences mean cultural inferiority."[7]

To redress "this tragic state of affairs," federal laws were passed in the 1970s that provided guidance on the education of Native children and that called for increased tribal control, including oversight and direction of Indian education.[8] In spite of the passage of such landmark legislation, the federal government and its agents failed to meet the federal trust responsibility for the education of Native children. In 1991, the *Indian Nations at Risk* report[9] cited the (1) failure of public schools to educate many Native children, (2) loss of Indigenous languages and cultures, (3)

attacks on Native lands, and (4) failure to appropriately acknowledge and support tribes' right to exist as fully self-determined individuals and groups.

Who Are American Indian Children and Youth Today?

There are approximately 640,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students living in all 50 states, with more than 100,000 residing in the state of Oklahoma alone. Many live in geographically isolated areas, making it difficult to access needed educational supports and services.[10] Providing these supports and services to Native students is complicated not only by geographic isola-

Younger students at Carlisle taking a cooking class in 1901.

tion and dispersion, but by the wide array of tribal, cultural, and linguistic diversity represented among this nation's Native peoples. This is evidenced by the fact that there are more than 600 state and federally recognized tribes, with approximately 170 different Indigenous languages, in addition to English, spoken.[11]

Where Are Native Students Educated Today?

The majority of Native children (approximately 90 percent) attend public schools. The remainder attend schools operated or funded by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), located within the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the US Department of the Interior, or private schools.[12] There are approximately 180 schools, including boarding schools, operated or funded by the BIE and tribes.* Of these, approximately 130 schools are contracted out to tribes to support the enactment of "tribal self-determination,"[13]

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*For more information on BIE schools, visit bie.edu/schools.

which is a move toward increased tribal self-government (including the right to determine and control the priorities and future directions of tribal nations and their citizens). Similar to public schools and school districts, curriculum and instruction—and the extent to which Native languages, cultures, and histories are taught—varies from one tribally operated school to the next. Although the BIE is tasked with fiscal oversight of many of these schools, a recent report by the US Government Accountability Office[14] found problems with financial management, facilities, and staffing. The lack of adequate financial management often causes delays in the hiring of teachers and other personnel,

resulting in students not receiving timely or adequate educational supports or services. Similarly, the lack of fiscal resources and oversight results in many school buildings that are in need of repair.

How Can We Ensure Native Children Have Access to Culturally Relevant Teaching and Learning Practices in Schools?

Unfortunately, longstanding issues persist, as evidenced by a lack of fiscal and physical resources in BIE-operated and -funded schools, tribal schools, and public schools. As a result, many Native children and youth continue to attend schools where there are few Native teachers and administrators, there is a lack of culturally responsive and relevant curricula and related instructional practices, education programs are underfunded, and facilities are inadequately resourced and maintained.[15]

In recent years, however, state and federal agencies have come together to identify and work to address persistent inequalities in the education of Native students. An

example of this collaboration is the federally funded National Indian Education Study,[16] conducted in conjunction with the National Assessment of Educational Progress. This study provides a unique opportunity for tribes, states, governmental agencies, and others to explore and better understand the ways in which Native languages and cultures are incorporated into the teaching and learning environment.† As the members of the Technical Review Panel for the National Indian Education Study point out, "One of the greatest challenges [for educators] is ensuring that Native students are able to perform well academically while maintaining their Native cultures and languages."[17] In order to meet this challenge, it is imperative that educators, parents, and community members have a sense of how Native languages, cultures, traditions, and funds of knowledge are being incorporated into the teaching and learning process within multiple types of schools. This is critical if we are to ensure that Native children have access to and benefit from culturally relevant teaching and learning practices in school.

–S. C. F.

Endnotes

1. K. Lomawaima and J. Ostler, "Reconsidering Richard Henry Pratt: Cultural Genocide and Native Liberation in an Era of Racial Oppression," *Journal of American Indian Education* 57, no. 1 (2018): 82.

2. See, for example, Lomawaima and Ostler, "Reconsidering Richard Henry Pratt."

3. *Indian Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge*, 1969 Report of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, US Senate, Made by Its Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, Report No. 91-501 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1969).

4. L. Meriam, *The Problem of Indian Administration: Report of a Survey Made at the Request of Honorable Hubert Work, Secretary of the Interior, and Submitted to Him* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1928), 346.

5. Meriam, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 349.

6. National Advisory Council on Indian Education, *First Annual Report to the Congress of the United States from the National Advisory Council on Indian Education* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1974), 92.

7. National Advisory Council on Indian Education, *First Annual Report*, 92.

8. For additional information on landmark legislation, see J. Tippeconnic, "A Survey: Attitudes Toward the Education of American Indians," *Journal of American Indian Education* 28, no. 1 (1988).

9. *Indian Nations at Risk: An Educational Strategy for Action*, Final Report of the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 1991).

10. National Congress of American Indians, *Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction* (Washington, DC: 2015).

11. US Census Bureau, "Native North American Languages Spoken at Home in the United States and Puerto Rico: 2006–2010," US Department of Commerce, December 2011, www2.census.gov/library/publications/2011/acs/acsbr10-10.pdf.

12. National Congress of American Indians, *Tribal Leaders Toolkit: Education Choice for Indian Country; Supporting Tribal Decision Making for Schools and Students* (Washington, DC: 2018).

13. For more on self-determination, see, for example, S. Cornell

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†For more on the importance of building on students' cultures, see *How People Learn II: Learners, Contexts, and Cultures*, available at bit.ly/3j5t3yT.

from Hawaiian as "Beautiful Little One." However, 10 years ago, I became a mother to my own beautiful little one by way of adoption. Mothering this child has been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences in my life and has helped to reinforce my commitment to equitable and just education and care for all.

<div style="background-color:#E8503A; color:white; padding:1em;">
We must meld the professional wisdom of teachers and the cultural and traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples.
</div>

For the past 10 years, I have worked to balance my professional role as a scholar and educator with my personal role as a mother and caretaker. In many cases, these roles have coincided, yet there are times when they clash quite fiercely. It is in these moments of conflict that I have had to check my own moral and ethical compass to ensure that I am embodying all that I encourage others to do through my teaching, scholarship, and writing—to call out educational and societal injustices and to place children at the center of our work.

The need to engage in this process of introspection and reflection, and to do more than just talk about equity and justice, was crystallized for me as my family moved from Pennsylvania to North Carolina and prepared for our daughter to begin preschool. We informed the school that our daughter and I are Native, so I was not prepared to walk into the preschool and hear the children and teachers singing "One Little, Two Little, Three Little Indians" or to see them making and wearing paper headbands with feathers made of construction paper. Upon discussing these concerns with the preschool administration, we were told that this was part of the curriculum and that curricular decisions were made at the system level (not by the preschool). Unsatisfied with this response, we continued to advocate against such activities while also recognizing the difficulties of changing a system that had limited local control. We did what we could but also weighed the potentially negative impact of our continued advocacy on our daughter.

Two years later, we faced a similar situation when our daughter started kindergarten, and we learned that the first-graders in her school would be making paper feathers and headbands as part of the American Indian unit. Once again we approached school leaders and the teacher. This time school officials said they would "reluctantly acquiesce" to our request not to conduct this activity. The following year, we decided to move our daughter to another school—one that embodied a commitment to justice, equity, and inclusion and that willingly took on the challenge of reviewing and revising its approach to teaching.

Two years later we moved to Colorado. Once again we were disappointed to find that our daughter's school sponsored an

Engaging with Native American Students, Culture, and History

Resources for Culturally Responsive Practices

- In a blog post series published by Education Northwest (bit.ly/33xJGOZ), educator Mandy Smoker Broaddus shares strategies for creating a more welcoming school community for Native* students, being more culturally responsive in engaging Native families, and positively including Native families and caregivers in their children's schooling. Such strategies include educators and schools making connections with Native students' backgrounds and cultures across the curriculum, ensuring that aspects of Native cultures are reflected in classrooms and hallways, and partnering with Native cultural experts to build awareness of cultural norms.
- Native Knowledge 360° is an online resource from the National Museum of

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*The terms American Indian, Native American, and Native are used interchangeably in this list of resources.

the American Indian (s.si.edu/30E7uPA) featuring several classroom and professional development materials grounded in Native American perspectives. A wide array of digital lessons, including "Northern Plains Treaties: Is a Treaty Intended to Be Forever?" and "Pacific Northwest History and Cultures: Why Do the Foods We Eat Matter?," show high school students the cultural and geographic diversity of Native peoples in both historical and modern times. A section devoted to "Essential Understandings" (s.si.edu/3iFLBVT) can help educators and their students broaden their understanding as they supplement lessons on American Indian cultures, Indigenous knowledge, and tribal governance and sovereignty, among other topics.

- *State of the Field: The Role of Native Languages and Cultures in American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Student Achievement* is a policy brief and literature review on promising educational practices to support Native

students (bit.ly/3iBBMIT). Written by educational anthropologist and linguist Teresa McCarty, this brief highlights how rigorous programs in Native languages and cultures have positive effects not only on student achievement but also on the maintenance and development of Native languages and cultures. Hallmarks of such rigorous programs include building students' self-esteem and cultural pride, investing in the preparation of Native teachers, and engaging parents and elders in Native students' learning.

Rethinking the Meaning of Thanksgiving

- *A Story of Survival: The Wampanoag and the English* offers elementary school teachers important background information and culturally appropriate activities (bit.ly/30DtppL). Published by the Native American Student Services department of Oklahoma City Public Schools, this booklet includes "quick
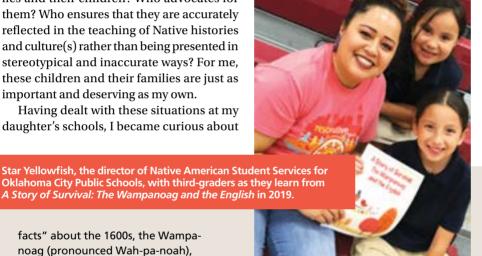
annual Thanksgiving event in which children dressed up and pretended to be Pilgrims and Indians. Again, we approached the school and explained why this event was culturally inappropriate. Happily, this time we were met with sincere questions *and* an acknowledgement that the school had never recognized the potentially negative impact of this event on Native children and their classmates. Following this discussion, the school agreed to reconsider the event and asked for our assistance in moving forward. Although we offered resources to the school, we also made it clear that the school had an obligation to do its own work, in addition to using the resources we provided.

What each of these experiences taught me is that I am one of the fortunate ones. My years as an educator and scholar who is Native have equipped me with the language and agency to advocate for our daughter and to engage educational systems and structures that are too often unwelcoming to parents and families, particularly those from historically marginalized groups. Although I recognized my own power and privilege, I remained concerned about those who do not have the same privilege and power as my family and me. What happens to these families and their children? Who advocates for them? Who ensures that they are accurately reflected in the teaching of Native histories and culture(s) rather than being presented in stereotypical and inaccurate ways? For me, these children and their families are just as important and deserving as my own.

Having dealt with these situations at my daughter's schools, I became curious about

how other schools were presenting Native peoples, cultures, and histories, particularly during the Thanksgiving holiday and the month of November. So I began searching social media (i.e., Twitter and Facebook). To my dismay, I found numerous schools depicting students making and wearing paper feathers and headbands, assigning "Indian" names, and misappropriating Native cultures and traditions, just to name a few activities.* As I found these images and practices, I began to reach out to the teachers and schools, via social media, explaining why such practices are culturally and pedagogically inappropriate and offering up alternate approaches and resources.† In many cases, either I was blocked or there was no response to my posting. However, in a few cases, schools and teachers responded by thanking me for calling out these practices and offering alternatives.

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*Sadly, a brief search online confirmed that my experience was not unique; see, for example, "Making Indian Headdresses in School Is a Terrible Way to Teach Kids About Thanksgiving," available at wapo.st/3dyFv8Z.
†See, for example, "Teaching Thanksgiving in a Socially Responsible Way," available at bit.ly/2GXXZEh.

Star Yellowfish, the director of Native American Student Services for Oklahoma City Public Schools, with third-graders as they learn from *A Story of Survival: The Wampanoag and the English* in 2019.

facts" about the 1600s, the Wampanoag (pronounced Wah-pa-noah), and the English, and offers tips such as inviting Native Americans into the classroom to share and discuss their cultures and having schools partner with nearby tribes. This resource also features lesson plans for specific books, such as *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush* by Tomie dePaola and *How the Stars Fell into the Sky: A Navajo Legend* by Jerrie Oughton. Suggestions for arts and crafts, such as creating reed dream catchers and corn husk dolls, are also included.

• A five-page study guide published by the National Museum of the American Indian, "Harvest Ceremony: Beyond the Thanksgiving Myth," is a helpful primer for teachers on the origins of the Thanksgiving holiday (s.si.edu/3d261HL). This guide explains the Wampanoag's first contact with the English and the harvest celebration in 1621 that came to be associated with Thanksgiving. Class-

room discussion topics, such as comparing the actual events of the first harvest festival to the modern-day holiday and researching various ways Native peoples give thanks, are also included.

• With "American Indian Perspectives on Thanksgiving," published by the National Museum of the American Indian, educators can present students with an accurate portrayal of the significant role the Wampanoag played in offering the Pilgrims the knowledge and skills they needed to survive (s.si.edu/2F5DF2C). This study guide, geared toward teachers in grades 4–8, focuses on three themes integral to understanding Native peoples both in the past and in the present: connection to the environment, sense of community, and cultural devastation as a result of first encounters with the Pilgrims.

• In "Thanksgiving Mourning," a lesson from Teaching Tolerance, students in grades 6–12 learn that for some Native peoples, Thanksgiving commemorates a day of lost freedom—not a peaceful exchange between European and Indigenous cultures (bit.ly/3nrrr5Y). After reading two texts, "The Suppressed Speech of Wamsutta James" from the United American Indians of New England and "Thanksgiving: A Native American View" by Jacqueline Keeler (an American Indian author and activist), students can discuss both authors' views of the meaning of Thanksgiving and write journal entries about how these texts have changed their own understanding. (For additional resources, see bit.ly/3nmJfyX.)

–S. C. F.

To me, this exercise demonstrated the need to rethink the ways in which we, as professors—and colleges of education—are preparing future educators as well as the ways in which we are supporting ongoing professional development for practicing teachers. We must ensure teachers and school leaders are equipped to engage in culturally relevant and responsive educational practices, particularly as they relate to teaching with and about Native peoples. This exercise also underscored the importance of supporting the development of parental and familial agency and advocacy as well as the need to welcome parents and families into our schools and classrooms.

Star Yellowfish observes first-graders at Heronville Elementary paint their interpretations of the story told in *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush* in 2019.

Melding Teachers' Wisdom and Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge

Seeing the ways in which many schools portrayed Native peoples, it was clear to me that neither colleges of education nor local education agencies are doing enough to ensure teachers have at their disposal a set of tools and practices that are culturally relevant and responsive for teaching about and with Native students. (For more on these tools and practices, see the box on page 32.) It was also evident that we need to revisit the notion of what constitutes best practices. Far too often, "best practices" are misunderstood as being readily transportable and implementable wholesale. Fortunately, some scholars have questioned this idea. For example, nearly a decade ago, a literature and program review noted that a great deal of research supports intentional adaptations that "build on the linguistic, cultural, cognitive, and affective strengths individual learners bring to school … [so as to] facilitate learners' self-efficacy, critical capacities, and intrinsic motivation as thinkers, readers, writers, and ethical social agents."[4]

When teachers are educating Native students, the identification and implementation of customized practices should occur in collaboration with Native peoples and communities. We must purposefully and intentionally create space for the coming together and melding of both the professional wisdom of teachers and the cultural and traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples and communities. Our children and our communities deserve nothing less. Unfortunately, such practices stand in stark contrast to what I experienced in school as a student, student-teacher, teacher, and parent.

Each night, I tuck my daughter into bed, kiss her forehead, stroke her hair, and tell her how much I love her. Occasionally, I shed a tear as I watch her drift off to sleep. Each morning I send her off to school with the hope that her teachers and her school will see the same beauty, intellect, and promise that I see in her, and that they will love, educate, and nurture her as if she were their own. At the same time, I fear that they will not see what I see, and that she will not be nurtured, loved, or cared for. Still, I send her to school. Each afternoon I welcome her home and ask about her day. Most days she answers with "meh" or some other nondescript response, before running off to play video games or join her friends. The next day we start the cycle again.

What sets me apart from my parents and elders, and from many of my peers, is that I have the social and economic capital that allow me to engage the school and teachers when I sense that something is not right in my daughter's education. I am able to ask questions and offer up resources. I can volunteer in the classroom and assist with her schoolwork. I can move her to a different school if necessary. But what connects me to my parents, elders, and peers is the knowledge that for generations of Native peoples, the education system has been used as a tool of forced assimilation and acculturation following the mantra first uttered by Colonel Richard Henry Pratt, founder of Carlisle Indian Industrial School.* Under Pratt's leadership, the federal Indian education policy of the late 1800s and early 1900s was "kill the Indian … and save the man."[5] This policy led to the separation of thousands of Indian children from their tribes, their languages, their cultures, and their homes. In many cases, it resulted in their deaths. (For more information, see the brief history on page 30.)†

The legacy of this era is ingrained in our collective histories and memories. It helps explain why many Native peoples remain wary of educational systems and structures. All educators have both an opportunity and a moral and ethical obligation to acknowledge and redress this legacy. To do so requires us to interrogate our own teachings, beliefs, and practices, and to acknowledge the ways in which we intentionally or unintentionally serve to sustain culturally dismissive and historically inaccurate teaching practices. In doing so, it is also critically important that our classrooms and schools become spaces in which parents, families, and community and tribal members are invited and welcomed as partners in our children's education and care. To build such relationships requires the establishment of trust and a commitment to not only listening but hearing and honoring the dreams and aspirations that parents and families have for our children's academic and cultural development and well-being. This work will take time and intentionality, and it will not be easy, but it must be done if Native children and youth are to be educated in ways that are equitable, just, and appropriate. □
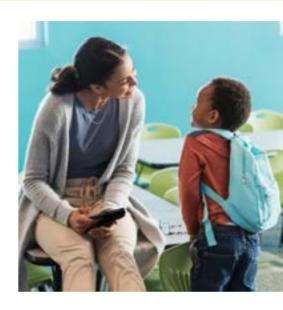
(Endnotes on page 40)

TEACHING ABOUT IDENTITY, RACISM, AND FAIRNESS

Engaging Young Children in Anti-Bias Education

BY LOUISE DERMAN-SPARKS AND JULIE OLSEN EDWARDS, WITH CATHERINE M. GOINS

Anti-bias education is an optimistic commitment to supporting children who live in a highly diverse and yet still inequitable world. Rather than a formula for a particular curriculum, it is an underpinning perspective and framework that permeates everything in early childhood education—including your interactions with children, families, and colleagues. Anti-bias education developed from the need to identify and prevent, as much as possible, the harmful emotional and psychological impacts on children from societal prejudice and bias. Its four core goals reflect research about these negative influences.

Louise Derman-Sparks has been an anti-bias education teacher of children and adults, author, and national and international consultant. Julie Olsen Edwards has been a family childcare provider, teacher, center director, teacher educator, writer, and advocate for children, families, and teachers. Catherine M. Goins is an early childhood education administrator, diversity educator, and college instructor. This article is adapted with permission from their book, Anti-Bias Education for Young Children & Ourselves, *Second Edition (Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020).*

GOAL 1, IDENTITY

- Teachers will nurture each child's construction of knowledgeable and confident personal and social identities.
- Children will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.

GOAL 2, DIVERSITY

- Teachers will promote each child's comfortable, empathic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Children will express comfort and joy with human diversity, use accurate language for human differences, and form deep, caring connections across all dimensions of human diversity.

GOAL 3, JUSTICE

- Teachers will foster each child's capacity to critically identify bias and will nurture each child's empathy for the hurt bias causes.
- Children will increasingly recognize unfairness (injustice), have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.

GOAL 4, ACTIVISM

- Teachers will cultivate each child's ability and confidence to stand up for oneself and for others in the face of bias.

- Children will demonstrate a sense of empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

More specifically, applying the four anti-bias education core goals to racialized identity includes:

- Children will feel positive, but not superior or inferior, about their racialized identities. They will understand that their skin color or eye shape or hair texture does not determine their value as human beings.
- Children will have accurate words and information about each other's different racialized identities. They will also appreciate their shared humanity and how they are like each other.
- Children will develop beginning skills for identifying and questioning misinformation, stereotypical ideas and images, and hurtful behaviors directed at their own and others' racialized identities. They will know that it is not fair to treat people hurtfully because of who they are.
- Children will demonstrate beginning skills for interrupting biased behaviors targeted at their own and others' racialized identities and for creating a fair classroom environment.

AWARENESS AND CURIOSITY

Young children are aware of and curious about people's features related to what society calls *race*. Eye shape, skin color, and hair fascinate children and are the first aspects of racialized social identity that they notice. By age 4, children begin to pick up on social identity terms for their own and other groups, which can be quite puzzling for them. They also begin to pick up misinformation, stereotypes, and negative attitudes about themselves and others. Here are three examples of young children grappling with these ideas:

"How do people get their color?" asks 3-and-a-half-year-old Thomas, who is white.

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"I'm not Black. I'm African American," Ebonie, 4 years old, says earnestly to her teacher.

❋ ❋ ❋

Rosalie, a 5-year-old Puerto Rican girl, is reluctant to move out of the shaded areas of the play yard. She explains to her teacher, "If I get sun on my skin, it will get darker. My family says I'm dark enough already."

Biologically, there is no such thing as race. All people are members of one race, *Homo sapiens*, the human race—even though everyone does not look the same. However, in a society where systemic racism exists, *everyone* has a racialized identity, an identity that holds power in the life of each person. All children grow up surrounded by and absorbing the socially prevailing positive and negative messages about themselves and others, which come from media; from educational, religious, and legal institutions; and from the behavior and beliefs of the important adults in their lives.

No one has the individual choice to opt out of socially assigned racialized identities. *But each person has a choice about how to live with them.* People have the capacity for acquiring new knowledge and feelings about their own social identities as well as the social identities of other individuals. Members of the white racial group can choose to believe in the myths of superiority that justify advantages and privileges to their group. Or they can reject those myths and work to end the system of racism that creates these dynamics. Members of groups targeted by racism can live as if the myths of inferiority are true descriptions of themselves. Or they can reject those damaging notions and work against the ideas and structures that create social disadvantage for them.

Some people think that if no one noticed or spoke about differences in skin color, racialized social identities and racism would disappear. However, that isn't the answer. Pretending not to notice differences devalues the real-life experiences of people of color and ignores the reality of white advantages. Anti-bias education rests on the premise that, as long as *racism* continues to exist, everyone—children, families, teachers, community members—absorbs society's messages about racialized social identity groups. But—and this is a big but—*anti-bias educators can learn to clean their lenses to see with a more accurate eye and mind and a caring heart.*

INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACE AND CLASS

Systemic racism continues to powerfully affect the lives of children and their families. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), children of color are still more likely to experience adverse societal conditions than white children. "Poverty is the single biggest threat to children's healthy development."[1] NCCP's analysis of 2016 statistics illustrates how the relationship between families living with low income (below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold) or in poverty (below 100 percent of the federal poverty threshold) varies by race and ethnicity. While some young children of *all* racial backgrounds live in low-income, poor, or deep poverty (less than 50 percent of the federal poverty threshold) families, the data reveal the impact of institutional racism on economics.[2]

In 2016, 13 percent of white children lived in poor families and 6 percent lived in deep poverty.[3] Thirty-seven percent of African American children's families were in the poor category and 19 percent in deep poverty. In addition, 30 percent of Latinx young children's families lived in poverty and 13 percent in deep poverty. Among Native American children's families, 39 percent were living in poverty and 19 percent in deep poverty. These systemic economic facts tell us that white children and families are still more likely to have access to resources that support healthy development and future success than are children and families of color. Risks are greatest for children who experience poverty when they are young or experience deep, persistent poverty.[4]

Incarceration of a family member is another developmental stressor that reflects the systemic racism in the lives of children of color. The Annie E. Casey Foundation looked more closely at the 5 million children with a parent in jail or prison at some point in their lives. African American and Latinx children are over seven times more likely than their white peers to have a parent who is incarcerated. This situation exists for several reasons, including racial profiling, lack of money for bail, and longer prison sentences. "More than 15 percent of children with parents in federal prison—and more than 20 percent with parents in state prison—are 4 or younger."[5] The incarceration of a parent has a great impact on a child's well-being.

There is research evidence that high-quality early childhood education programs can play a valuable role in countering the traumatic effects of poverty and racism. One world-renowned longitudinal study explored the outcomes of the Ypsilanti Perry Preschool Project (1962–1967), an experimental high-quality preschool program for African American children living in poverty in a small Michigan city.* The HighScope Educational Research Foundation documented the lives of the children attending the preschool program and followed them until midlife.[6] A control group of children with similar demographics but no preschool experience was also followed. The Center for the Economics of Human Development, at the University of Chicago, then carried out further assessments when the children were in their mid-50s.[7]

These studies found that children participating in the Perry Preschool Project had important lifelong gains in education (completing high school and, for a few, college), in employment, and in

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*Louise Derman-Sparks (the first author of this article) was one of the Perry Preschool teachers. For her account of the educational program she and her colleagues developed, see bit.ly/3jHPjzG.

personal life outcomes. All of these outcomes were significantly better than those of the children in the control group. Of equal importance, the next generation, the children of the Perry Preschool participants, also showed significant gains in education, health, employment, and civic life.

YOUNG CHILDREN CONSTRUCT IDEAS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT RACIALIZED IDENTITIES

From infancy on, children absorb messages about the construct of race from a range of sources—family, teachers, media, peers, books, and social, political, and religious institutions. From these messages, they gradually form an internalized racialized identity. Thus, everyone's racialized identity is imposed from the outside and constructed from the inside.

This process is based on three dynamics. One is how the society into which children are born defines racial groups and assigns racialized identities. These definitions are often codified in law and then disseminated through a range of sources. A second dynamic is children's life experiences, particularly how children are valued and treated by the significant people in their lives, such as family and teachers. The third dynamic is how individual children come to think and feel about who they are, a process that continues throughout life.

Research studies exploring young children's awareness and attitudes about racialized identities seriously began in the 1950s.[8] This body of research contradicts the mistaken belief that young children do not notice or show interest in features connected to racial group membership, particularly skin color. Even infants and toddlers begin to notice and show curiosity about differences in skin color.[9] By the time children are 3 and 4 years old, they become aware of value judgments and feelings related to various racialized identities and begin to act on negative feelings about others that they absorb.[10]

Diversity does not cause prejudice, nor does children noticing and talking about differences, as some adults fear. Children learn prejudice from messages and images of prejudice. They also learn from the silence or discomfort of adults when children ask or comment about the human differences they see around them.

In contrast, when you actively pay attention to children's developing ideas and feelings about their own and others' racialized identities, you foster their ability to gain accurate knowledge and develop self-esteem. Interacting with children about their developing ideas and feelings also counters misinformation, unease, or hurtful ideas about members of various racialized groups. By breaking the silence, you and the children's families can nurture

their accurate knowledge, empathy, enjoyment, and anti-bias relationships with racially diverse people.

Contrary to what some people assume, white children—as well as children of color—also develop a racialized identity. White children continually receive messages from families, communities, and media about white normalcy, superiority, and entitlement and construct their ideas about being white in the context of systemic, cultural, and individual racism.[11] Very early, white children come to value their whiteness, presume it is the definition of normal, and believe that therefore all other skin colors are strange and less than.[12] While early childhood teachers want all children to like who they are, the challenge for an anti-bias educator is to enable white children to like who they are without developing a sense of white superiority.

One of the pioneers in the study of how young children develop identity and prejudice, Kenneth Clark, noted many years ago the ways racism also harms white children's development. He describes how growing up with the societal contradiction between the professed goals of equality and democracy and the pressures to violate them by acting on racial prejudice can create moral conflicts and guilt for white children. He also warned that white children "are being given a distorted perception of reality

STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES ABOUT RACIALIZED IDENTITIES AND FAIRNESS

Anti-bias educators intentionally and proactively integrate the message into the daily life of their classroom that people of every racialized identity are valuable and deserve caring and fairness. Here, we offer ways to go about this work in your classroom.

Use your school philosophy, handbook, and enrollment materials to welcome all people. It is not enough to say your program does not discriminate. Throughout the setting and in materials provided to families, include images of peoples of many racial (and ethnic) groups. Ask *all* families questions about what terms they use to describe their racial and ethnic identities so you can respect their choices. You may also learn that some families aren't sure how to name their children's racialized identities or prefer not to give them a racialized identity at all. As all children are exposed to ideas about racialized identity, it becomes important that they have words to describe themselves and others. This is likely to be an ongoing conversation with families.

Make racial diversity visible in your learning environment. Children learn what is important to adults in the program by observing what is and isn't in the learning environment. Make racial and cultural diversity visible in the books, posters, dolls, puzzles, and art materials (crayons, felt pens, paints, and paper in different skin tones). Be sure to include accurate images of children and families with biracial and multiracial identities. Some teachers mix up all the people figures in one box so children can form whatever variation of a family they wish.

Go through your classroom library and assess your collection. How many books do you have in which the main characters are white? In how many are people of color the main character of the story? What appearance and cultural stereotypes of people of color do your books perpetuate? Make a list of books you would like to have in the classroom and outline a plan for how you will acquire new books. Add to your collection with books from your local public library.

Use teachable moments. Children's questions and comments are all potential teachable moments. What may seem like a little thing by itself can be a big thing to a child. If you can't think of what to say or become uncomfortable responding directly and matter-of-factly to an incident, or later feel you didn't handle your initial response well, talk to someone you trust to explore your feelings and possible alternative responses. Then, *always* go back to the children with your new response. The following is an example of one such teachable moment:

During story time, Hector (white, age 4) leans over and touches Jamal's hair. Jamal (African American, age 4) pushes his hand away. Their teacher observes the interaction and steps in.

Teacher:	What's happening?
Jamal:	Don't like him touching my hair. He didn't ask me if it's okay.
Teacher:	How come you touched his hair, Hector?
Hector:	Wanna know what it feels like.

and of themselves and are being taught to gain personal status in unrealistic ways."[13]

The social-political and psychological dimensions of race and racism remain a contentious and painful issue in society. If early childhood educators want children to thrive in a diverse world, they must commit to helping them make sense of the confusing and often emotionally charged messages they receive about their own and other people's racialized identities.

Give children language to discuss their identities, and answer their questions in an atmosphere of interest, delight, and accurate information. Plant seeds of openness and connection. Teach them tools for addressing the unfairness they will inevitably encounter, and encourage them to stand up for themselves and others. You can help children construct a strong foundation for thriving in a diverse world now and into the future. ☐

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This article is adapted from *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children & Ourselves* by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards, with Catherine M. Goins, which offers a comprehensive look at helping children understand multifaceted identities, respect diversity of all kinds, think critically, and take action against biases. This volume is needed now more than ever. Our country is rife with division and discord, so it is even more important to teach fairness and inclusion. Doing so can be challenging, but this book offers educators concrete examples for engaging young children in conversations that deepen their knowledge of themselves and ultimately strengthen their relationships with each other.

—EDITORS

Teacher: Jamal, would it be okay if Hector asked first?

Jamal: Yes. *(He turns to Hector.)* Ask me and then you can touch it. Then I want to touch your hair.

Because Jamal has given his permission, the teacher says, "Yes, it's interesting to touch and learn about each other's hair as long as we ask first. Did Jamal's hair feel the same as or different from your hair?" (If Jamal had said it was not all right for Hector to touch his hair, then the teacher might have said, "We need to respect what Jamal says. There are other ways to learn about each other's hair.") The teacher decided to plan a series of activities for children to learn about and appreciate different kinds of hair.

Explore how physical features are both alike and different. Make a life-size cutout of each child from butcher paper. Use mirrors to help each child observe and paint their skin, eyes, and hair color. Be sure you have crayons, paints, and yarn in all the shades you need.

Ask children for their ideas about what skin, hair, and eyes do for them. Talk about how skin, hair, and eyes do the same work for all people, regardless of their color.

Explore the range of ways that children and staff look. (Even in a classroom of all white children and staff, there will be differences in skin color and features like freckles, skin tone, eye color, and length of hair.)

Make a bulletin board of color photographs of each child and the members of each child's family. You can take photographs of the family members yourself or invite them to provide their own. Talk about ways in which each child looks and does not look like their family members. Focus on the fact that everyone gets their looks from their birth parents, but they never look exactly the same as their birth parents. Also, make clear that children who are adopted get their skin color, eye shape, and so on from their birth parents, and these attributes may or may not be like those of their adoptive parents. Place the bulletin board at the children's viewing height.

Explore how children who look different from one another still often like to do the same things. Take photographs of the children doing various activities and make a book featuring children who look different doing the same activity (e.g., "Pedro and Amani like to create new songs and dances" or "Heather and Kia like to write messages on the drawing tablet").

Read books about the beauty of the different ways we look, such as *Shades of People* by Shelley Rotner and Sheila Kelly, *All the Colors We Are/Todos los colores de nuestra piel* by Katie Kissinger, and *I Am Latino: The Beauty in Me* by Sandra Pinkney. All of these have simple language and beautiful images.

Pay attention to indicators of confusion or self-rejection. When children make self-portraits or family drawings, sometimes they choose colors that do not correspond to their actual skin, eye, or hair coloring. It is important to ask the child about these choices. Sometimes they indicate discomfort or shame about the child's actual coloring. It is useful, in a conversational tone, to ask the child to talk to you about the portrait. If the coloring is playful (some children paint themselves with rainbow colors or bright green) and the child seems relaxed, you need not take further action. If the child seems uncomfortable describing the colors in the portrait, it is useful to watch for additional indicators of confusion or self-rejection.

If you are concerned, observe the child and make a plan for what you can do to strengthen the child's identity. Check in with other staff about what they have observed and speak with the child's family about what they want their child to know about racial identity and how you can support the child's positive sense of self in the classroom.

–L. D.-S. and J. O. E., with C. M. G.

Identifying and Teaching Students with Significant Reading Problems

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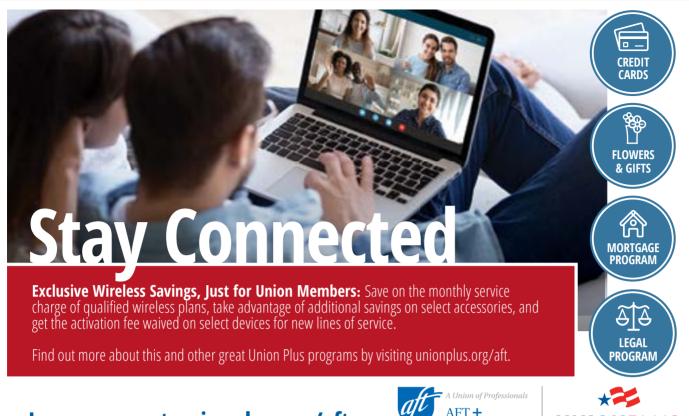## The Education of American Indian Students

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Share the love of reading this holiday season!

Your students (and you!) accomplished incredible things in 2020. Celebrate by making sure kids have opportunities to read, play, and learn during winter break and beyond. Whether you work with administrators to find school funds or seek support from community partners, educators serving kids in need can explore First Book's Holiday Shop for gifts of cheer, from the year's best books to cozy winter gear. Find something special for every child (ages 0–18) with our festive variety of budget-friendly and majorly gift-worthy books, games, and more.

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