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MYTHS *or* FACTS?

Donald Trump on Education

As Trump doubles down on his flawed education ideology, it's worth checking his facts.

Claim

Trump says his \$20 billion program would provide vouchers for 11 million students to attend the schools of their choice.

Reality

Trump's plan would harm 10 students for every 1 student it covers. The average cost of a K-12 private school is [\\$13,640](#) per student, per year. To fund his \$20 billion voucher program, Trump would have to cut all Title I funding and another \$5 billion in other federal education programs. **The Title I cuts alone could strip critical federal funding from up to 56,000 public schools serving more than 21 million children.**

Here is the likely impact of this massive Title I cut:

- Losing tens of thousands of highly qualified teachers and classroom aides, increasing class sizes and decreasing students' access to one-on-one attention.
- Cutting curriculum improvement programs and professional development for educators.
- Firing counselors and ending counseling programs that help at-risk kids stay in school.
- Cutting funding for classroom technology, school supplies and other critical materials for high-needs students.

Claim

Vouchers boost student achievement by allowing families to choose private schools.

Reality

Trump's proposal could have a devastating impact on student achievement. According to studies of voucher programs in the [District of Columbia, Milwaukee and Cleveland](#), and most recently in [Indiana and Louisiana](#), students offered vouchers do not perform better in reading and math than students in public schools. Voucher programs also fail to offer participating students greater educational resources. [Department of Education studies](#) of the D.C. voucher program show participants are less likely to have access to English as a Second Language programs, learning support and special needs programs, tutors, counselors, and school nurses than students not in the program.

Claim

Vouchers improve opportunities for kids from low-income families.

Reality

Vouchers rarely cover the cost of tuition or other mandatory fees for private schools. In Wisconsin, the state Department of Public Instruction found that [67 percent of voucher applicants were already enrolled in private schools](#). Under most voucher programs, a private school can take taxpayer money but [still deny admission to any student](#). In contrast, public schools, which serve 90 percent of American students, do not turn children or families away.

Claim

"I'm not cutting services, but I'm cutting spending. And I may cut the Department of Education."

Reality

In addition to his brazen voucher scheme, Trump's promise to cut the Department of Education would slash services to those students most in need. This is the impact of his rhetoric on real people:

- [8 million students](#) every year would lose Pell grants.
- 490,000 or more teacher positions would be eliminated.
- [5 million](#) children and students with disabilities would lose [\\$12.7 billion](#) used every year to ensure that they receive a high-quality education.
- [750,000](#) or more students from military families, Native American students, students living in U.S. territories, and students living on federal property or Native American lands would lose [\\$1.1 billion](#) per year for their schools.
- [4,000](#) or more rural school districts would lose more than [\\$175 million](#) used annually to help improve the quality of teaching and learning in many hard-to-staff schools.
- [\\$700 million](#) used by states to support the [5 million](#) English language learners currently in public schools—representing close to 10 percent of all students—would be cut.





Engaging Students to Show What They Know

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

It was one of my proudest moments as a civics teacher—listening to my 11th-graders prepare to debate whether the decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was justified. And the debate was what every teacher hopes for: my students backed their positions with facts, played devil’s advocate, and respectfully challenged each other’s reasoning. As teacher and author David Sherrin writes in this issue, these are the times teachers know they have truly witnessed their students’ learning.

Last spring, I visited Sherrin’s classroom at Harvest Collegiate High School in New York City and witnessed *his* students’ learning as they shared their research on the experience of colonial women. Clearly, not only had these students learned so much from their research projects, but in presenting what they learned, they were teaching their classmates as well.

Sherrin’s article explores the mock trials he prepares his students to conduct several times each year. Reading it, I recalled the moot court trials my students conducted in the high school law class I taught. As they argued cases and issued judges’ opinions, my students showed levels of engagement and excitement we don’t always see among high school students. They gained knowledge and skills, and were proud of their accomplishments, developing a confidence that would serve them well in the future.

What all these examples have in common is that they are different forms of project-based learning, which, when it works, is one of the most effective ways to engage students and help them “own” the learning process. Students “show what they know” as they progress through the unit, not simply at its conclusion. This approach to teaching and learning tells us far more about what students know and can do than having them select A, B, C, or D on a standardized test ever could.

The focus on project-based learning in this issue is especially timely. The House of

Representatives recently voted overwhelmingly to pass the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, which will help offer students multiple pathways to prepare for the jobs of today and tomorrow through career and technical education (CTE) programs, such as the robotics program at Toledo Technology Academy in Ohio and San Francisco’s citywide collaboration to bring programming and computer science to all its public schools. And the Every Student Succeeds Act allows seven states

entity, whether it’s a sand castle on the beach or a theory of the universe.”

“This is the way that mathematics started,” Papert told the online journal *Edutopia*. “It started not as this beautiful, pure product of the abstract mind. It started as a way of controlling the water of the Nile, building the pyramids, sailing a ship. And gradually it got richer and richer.”

While abstract concepts may interest some learners, project-based learning can engage students. Building knowledge by working on actual problems and situations

Project-based learning helps develop skills students need and employers value.

to pilot innovative assessments, such as the performance-based assessments used in project-based learning.

Westinghouse High School in Pittsburgh is a great example of how project-based learning can be used in career and technical education programs. With a \$300,000 grant from the AFT Innovation Fund and support from the city, Westinghouse offers students a full academic program as well as a number of CTE programs. The newest program, preparing students for public safety careers in firefighting, emergency medical services, and law enforcement, uses project-based instruction to help students apply the technical knowledge and skills they will need to perform entry-level duties in these fields. The courses will lead to industry certifications based in large part on performance-based demonstrations of students’ competency.

Seymour Papert, the late visionary educator and mathematician, was an early advocate of this approach to learning, which he called “constructionism.” Constructionism, Papert wrote, is learning that happens “in a context where the learner is consciously engaged in constructing a public

entity, whether it’s a sand castle on the beach or a theory of the universe.”

There are barriers, in many schools, to using project-based learning. One is the unrelenting focus on standardized testing and its effect on curriculum and instruction. Another is the way the school day is often organized, with class periods that are too brief to undertake in-depth projects. And teachers need the time, tools, and trust to develop and refine project-based instruction, including opportunities for professional development, to confer with colleagues, and to experiment with different projects and approaches. But these barriers can and must be overcome, because project-based learning helps develop skills students need and employers value, such as collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking.

At a time when one presidential candidate’s education plan would destabilize public schools and decimate funding for public education, we must do what the other candidate has proposed: follow the evidence and lift up educational approaches that open doors for young people and propel the economy.



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A Great Match for Informational Texts

BY NELL K. DUKE

A time-honored method for challenging and engaging students with content has been getting a well-deserved second look. Research increasingly shows that project-based approaches—in which students build something, create something, solve a real problem, or address a real need—improve students' knowledge and skills. Close connections between today's reading and writing standards lend support to instructional approaches, like projects, that integrate reading and writing.

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A Program Encourages Students of Color to Become Teachers

BY BETTYE PERKINS

More than 20 years ago, the lack of teacher diversity prompted a former educator to start Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers, an organization that recruits and supports diverse and economically challenged students to consider teaching as a profession.

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The Case for a Teacher Like Me

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How Digital Media Can Promote Literacy Instead of Undermining It

BY LISA GUERNSEY AND MICHAEL H. LEVINE

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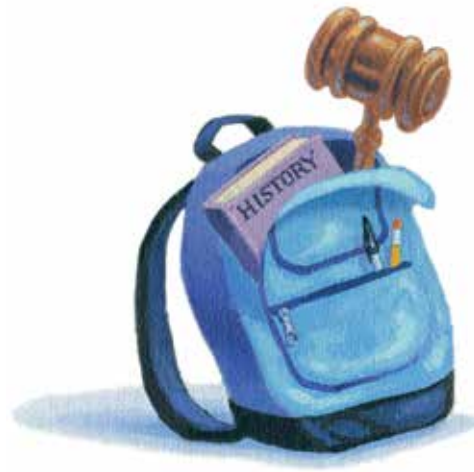
A retired English teacher reflects on helping students understand universal truths of literary works and the power of literature to help them navigate the world.

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How Mock Trials Bring Learning to Life

BY DAVID SHERRIN

A high school teacher of English and social studies shares his enthusiasm for mock trials and explains the effectiveness of role-play as a tool for student learning and engagement.



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Teaching Experience and Teacher Effectiveness

BY TARA KINI AND ANNE PODOLSKY

Do teachers continue to improve in their effectiveness as they gain experience in the teaching profession? Our report *Does Teaching Experience Increase Teacher Effectiveness? A Review of the Research* aims to answer that question by critically reviewing recent literature that analyzes the effect of teaching experience on student outcomes in K-12 public schools.

A renewed look at this research is warranted due to advances in research methods and data systems that have allowed researchers to more accurately answer this question. Specifically, by including teacher-fixed effects in their analyses, researchers have been able to compare a teacher with multiple years of experience with that same teacher when he or she had fewer years of experience. In contrast, older studies often used less precise methods, such as comparing distinct cohorts of teachers with different experience levels during a single school year.

Based on our review of 30 studies published within the last 15 years that analyze the effect of teaching experience on student outcomes in the United States, we find that:

1. Teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a teacher's career. Gains in teacher effectiveness associated with experience are steepest in teachers' initial years, but continue to be significant as teachers reach the second, and often third, decades of their careers.

2. As teachers gain experience, their students not only learn more, as measured by standardized tests, they are also more likely to do better on other measures of success, such as school attendance.
3. Teachers' effectiveness increases at a greater rate when they teach in a supportive and collegial working environment, and when they accumulate experience in the same grade level, subject, or district.



4. More-experienced teachers support greater student learning for their colleagues and their school, as well as for their own students.

Of course, there is variation in teacher effectiveness at every stage of the teaching career, so not every inexperienced teacher is less effective, and not every experienced teacher is more effective.

Nonetheless, policymakers generally craft policy for the norm, and therefore, it is important to recognize that, on average, the most effective 20-year teachers are significantly more effective than the most effective first-year teachers—and these positive effects reach beyond the experienced teacher's individual classroom to benefit the school as a whole.

Our research does not indicate that the passage of time will make all teachers better or make all less competent teachers effective. However, it does indicate that, for most teachers, experience increases effectiveness. The benefits

of teaching experience will be best realized when teachers are carefully selected and well prepared at the point of entry into the teaching workforce, as well as intensively mentored and rigorously evaluated prior to receiving tenure.

Policymakers' first task is to develop policies to attract high-quality individuals into the teaching profession. From there, given what the research says about the benefits of teaching experience,

policies aimed at reducing teacher turnover and accelerating teachers' professional learning should be pursued.

This research suggests that administrators and policymakers might seek to:

1. Increase stability in teacher job assignments so that teachers can refine their instruction at a given grade level and subject, as research shows that teachers who have repeated experience teaching the same grade level or subject area improve more rapidly

than those whose experience is in multiple grade levels or subject areas.

2. Create conditions for strong collegial relationships among school staff and a positive and professional working environment, as these contexts are associated with the greatest gains in teacher effectiveness.

3. Strengthen policies to promote the equitable distribution of more-experienced teachers and to discourage the concentration of novice teachers in high-need schools, so that students are not subjected to a revolving door of novice teachers, who are on average less effective than their more-experienced peers.

Other strategies for developing the teaching workforce and reducing turnover have been well documented elsewhere, such as providing clinically based preparation and high-quality mentoring for beginners as well as career advancement opportunities for expert, experienced teachers.

Tara Kini is a senior policy advisor and Anne Podolsky is a researcher and policy analyst at the Learning Policy Institute. This article is excerpted from the Learning Policy Institute's report Does Teaching Experience Increase Teacher Effectiveness? A Review of the Research, which is available at www.learningpolicyinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Teaching_Experience_Report_June_2016.pdf.

Project-Based Instruction

A Great Match for Informational Texts



BY NELL K. DUKE

New comments have come in on several students' blog posts. The students look on excitedly as the teacher shows the comments on the Smart Board. Dontae mentions that a neighbor stopped him the other day to talk about the blog. Several students ask the teacher to check on the number of hits the blog has received.

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This blog created by third-graders provides information about plants and animals that live around their school. While their blog's target audience is people who live near the school, they are excited to see comments from people in other parts of the region as well.

Students were inspired to start the blog after learning about Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, who writes a reader-friendly informational blog about marine life, primarily in the Caribbean. The students created their own blog, imitating many of Johnson's techniques. After learning about how to observe plant and animal life, and then observing the area around their school, each student chose a plant or animal of interest—such as moths, maple trees, snakes, and squirrels, to name a few—and researched it using a variety of informational sources. Like Johnson, the students also interviewed people about their interactions with local plant and animal life. Even in their urban area, they found evidence of a rich array of wildlife.

Over the course of the project, their teacher taught informational reading and writing skills as well as content. For example, the teacher taught students how to organize the information they

gathered and plan their writing using a planning map. The teacher knew that this strategy helped address part of a state standard for third-graders to “group related information together” when writing, but the students focused on learning the strategy to help serve the project in which they were so engaged. Indeed, students were engaged throughout the project—even, to the teacher’s delight, during revision and editing. Students’ usual refrains of “I’m done” were replaced with tireless efforts to make their blog posts as informative, clear, and clean as possible before posting them on the Internet for their school neighbors—and all the world—to see.

What I just described is project-based learning.* In this approach, students work over an extended time period for a purpose beyond satisfying a school requirement—to build something, to create something, to respond to a question they have, to solve a real problem, or to address a real need. For example, students might work to plan, plant, and cultivate a garden to help feed the hungry in their community; develop a guidebook for visitors at a nature preserve; study the problem of wasting food and then develop a plan to reduce waste in the school cafeteria; or research and write a history of their local community. Along the way, teachers build knowledge and teach skills, but in students’ minds, the knowledge and skills serve to meet the project’s goal (while in the teacher’s mind, they may also address specific state standards and meet district curriculum requirements).

Understanding Project-Based Learning

In part because it often addresses real-world opportunities and problems, project-based learning is typically interdisciplinary. For example, developing a guidebook for visitors at a nature preserve may involve work commonly associated with social studies, such as surveying visitors about their interests and researching the history of the preserve, as well as work commonly associated with science, such as observing and describing plant and animal life in the preserve.

Projects often involve a great deal of reading and writing, as in the guidebook project, for instance, which could entail writing surveys; reading, analyzing, and writing up the survey results; reading and synthesizing historical documents about the preserve; recording observations; and writing the guidebook itself. Students usually must communicate, both orally and in writing, with people outside of the classroom, such as the ranger of the preserve. Within the classroom, considerable speaking and listening are typically required as students work together to achieve project goals. These days, students often also use a wide range of technological tools.

Project-based approaches have been around at least since the beginning of progressive education. In the early 1900s, scholars such as John Dewey and William Heard Kilpatrick argued that learning by doing and making instruction purposeful for children would result in more powerful learning.¹

Although such approaches are not new, the time is especially ripe for them. First, the skills entailed in project-based learning are consistent with the so-called “21st-century skills”—creativity,

*Educators often ask about the difference between project-based learning and problem-based learning. Problem-based learning can be seen as a subtype of project-based learning, in which students work through a series of steps to generate a solution to a problem. Problem-based learning often occurs over a less extended period of time than other forms of project-based learning and is more likely to include simulations rather than a truly real-world context (although I believe that a truly real-world context should be in place when possible).



In a project-based approach, students work over an extended time period for a purpose beyond satisfying a school requirement.

critical thinking, and collaboration, among other skills—that are in demand for work and citizenship.

Second, as discussed later in this article, research is increasingly showing that project-based approaches improve students’ knowledge and skills. Some common components of project-based approaches also have support in research. For example, research suggests that reading and writing for specific purposes, beyond just acquiring basic skills and meeting certain school requirements, is associated with stronger reading and writing growth.² Moreover, project-based approaches often involve writing for specific audiences beyond members of the classroom. Research suggests that students actually write better under such circumstances.³

Third, project-based approaches are more engaging than many traditional kinds of instruction.⁴ Although motivation and engagement in schooling have always been important, they are more important now than ever.

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Standards expect much more from students than in the past; for students to engage in the hard, cognitive work necessary to meet these demanding standards, they need to be motivated and engaged in their learning.

Fourth, project-based approaches are particularly well suited to addressing today's standards. For example, in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, one of the anchor standards for reading calls for students to "integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words," as students are likely to do in projects. Likewise, an anchor standard for speaking and listening calls for students to "present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience." And an anchor standard for writing calls for students to "conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating

understanding of the subject under investigation." Similar expectations can be found in many state-specific standards.⁵

Projects typically involve interacting with some or many informational texts. To my knowledge, all states—those that have adopted the CCSS and also those that have not—now expect students to spend considerable time with informational texts, or texts that convey information about the natural and social world. The CCSS draw from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2009 reading framework in calling for "balancing the reading of literature with the reading of informational texts" in the elementary grades.⁶ Similarly, the CCSS follow the NAEP 2011 writing framework in calling for 35 percent of elementary students' writing to be informative/explanatory and 30 percent to be persuasive,⁷ an enormous increase over what had historically been expected.

Colleagues and I have long advocated for greater attention to informational text in elementary education.⁸ In 2000, I published a study documenting that a mere 3.6 minutes per day of instructional time in first-grade classrooms involved informational text, and even less—1.4 minutes per day—in low-socioeconomic-status school districts.⁹ In the decade that followed, I saw many signs that attention to informational text was on the rise (for example, in the degree to which publishers were producing and selling informational text for young children), but in actual classroom practice,¹⁰ attention to informational text at the elementary school level remained lower than I thought it should be.*

Then came the CCSS and many subsequent revisions—whether toward CCSS or not—to state standards, many of which placed greater emphasis on informational text than in previous iterations. You might think I would be thrilled with the greater attention to informational text that these standards are bringing. I am, in a way, but I am also experiencing a bad case of "be careful what you wish for." I am seeing a lot of instructional mistakes and misconceptions relating to using informational text with elementary-age students. When I called for greater opportunities for students to read and write informational text, I did *not* mean:

- Handing students difficult books without context on topics that may not be of inherent interest.
- Requiring students to write "reports" and "persuasive essays" for no particular reason other than satisfying a school requirement.
- Carrying out informational read-alouds no differently from fictional narrative read-alouds.
- Asking students a barrage of low-level questions about informational text content.
- Having students spend time developing "conventions notebooks" about informational text rather than actually using those conventions to achieve real communicative purposes.
- Administrators focusing rigidly on the percentage of informational text teachers are using, with little regard to the content of those texts or how they are being used.

I do understand why this is happening. Many educators, including myself, received little training in teaching with informational text in pre-service education. Many have experienced little or no professional development on the topic. And, in general,

Scholars such as John Dewey and William Heard Kilpatrick argued that learning by doing would result in more powerful learning.



*For more on the lack of content in the elementary grades, see "Content on the Cutting-Room Floor," in the Summer 2014 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/summer2014/wattenberg.



Table 1: How Project-Based Literacy Instruction Differs from Traditional Literacy Instruction

Traditional Literacy Instruction	Project-Based Literacy Instruction
Students read, write, and learn because you told them to, their parents want them to, and/or they think they should.	Students read, write, and learn because there is a real-world problem to solve, a need to address, or a question to answer.
Students attend to lessons because they're supposed to.	Students attend to lessons because doing so will help them achieve their project goal.
Students complete their homework to obtain a sticker or avoid negative consequences.	Students complete their homework because it helps them get one step closer to their project goal.
Each student works on his or her own writing, which may be unrelated to that of his or her classmates.	Whether writing individually or collaboratively, students work together toward a common writing goal.
Reading, writing, and each content area are taught in different parts of the day.	Reading, writing, and one or more content areas are often integrated.
Students read discrete texts largely unrelated to each other.	Students read many texts on the same topic or closely related topics.
Students read informational text because they were asked to do so.	Students read informational text because they want or need information.
Students write informational text for implicit purposes, for you, their classmates, and perhaps themselves.	Students write informational text for explicit purposes and for audiences beyond the classroom.
Students revise for a better grade.	Students revise to communicate more clearly and convincingly to their audience.
Students revise and edit because they are in the revising and editing phase of the writing process.	Students revise and edit because they want their work to be as credible and polished as possible for their audience.
Students are tested on what they have learned.	Students apply what they have learned.
Students look forward to receiving a grade on their writing.	Students look forward to sharing their writing with the target audience.
Students learn to read and write.	Students learn to affect the world around them through reading and writing.

Many educators, including myself, received little training in teaching with informational text in pre-service education.

researchers, publishers, and administrators have been slow to meet the pressing needs in this area. To that end, I hope this article, and my book from which portions of it are drawn, *Inside Information: Developing Powerful Readers and Writers of Informational Text Through Project-Based Instruction*, can play some small part in helping educators move toward higher-quality informational reading and writing instruction. (See Table 1 for a description of how project-based literacy instruction differs from traditional literacy instruction.)

Why Project-Based Learning Works

Research on project-based learning suggests positive effects on academic achievement and attitudes.¹¹ For example, Pedro Hernandez-Ramos and Susan De La Paz studied eighth-graders' learning about the westward expansion and their attitudes related to that learning.¹² One group of students experienced a project-based approach in which they created documentaries on the topic. The other group experienced more traditional forms of instruction. Pre- and post-assessments of content knowledge, attitudes, and engagement revealed that students experiencing the project-based approach had developed greater content knowledge and reported much higher engagement in learning history than students in the traditional instruction group. Stu-

dents who experienced the project-based approach also demonstrated greater historical reasoning skills and learned more complex information related to the topic.¹³

It's important to understand that project-based learning is for all students, not just for older students or gifted students. Some educators in high-poverty districts have told me that this kind of teaching "just isn't practical for our students." The research so far

does not support that position. Studies include first-graders through high school students, students with learning disabilities, and students in high-poverty school settings.

In fact, in a study of a project-based approach to teaching social studies and content literacy to second-graders, my colleagues and I were able to statistically close the gap between students in high-poverty school districts—who experienced project-based units—and students in wealthy school districts—who did not—on standards-based measures of social studies and informational reading skills.¹⁴ Although that study was small in scale, it is certainly promising with respect to the use of project-based approaches with young children in high-poverty settings.

In a more recent study, we randomly assigned 48 second-grade teachers in high-poverty, low-performing school districts either to use four project-based units we had developed to teach social studies and some informational text skills, or to teach social studies as they normally would.¹⁵ Even in their first year of teaching these units, with no prior experience teaching in a project-based learning approach, teachers who taught our project-based units had students with higher achievement on standards-aligned social studies and informational reading measures than students in the comparison group. Further, the more strongly the teachers implemented the projects, the higher growth students made in informational reading and writing and in motivation.

How to Include Project-Based Learning in the School Day

As noted earlier, project-based learning is often interdisciplinary, and it often involves both reading and writing (as well as speaking and listening). So where does it fit in the school day? Science time? Social studies time? Reading time? Writing time?

One option is to have a time of day (e.g., just after lunch) or a day of week (e.g., every Friday) specifically devoted to project-based learning. This may allow you to sidestep, to some degree, labeling the project within a particular content area.

Another option is to place it in the block that makes the most sense in terms of topic. For example, a bird guide for a local nature sanctuary might be created during science, whereas a proposal about creating bike lanes might be developed during social studies. Of course, to place project work in a particular content-area slot, you need to make sure that it really foregrounds that discipline—otherwise, there is a danger it will supplant the important work you need to be doing in that content area.

You may be wondering what to make of the fact that project-based learning involves reading and writing instruction within the same block of time. You may remember a time when reading, writing, and the content areas were often integrated, for example, under the auspices of thematic teaching, but today this is the exception, not the rule, in U.S. elementary classrooms. Typically, there is a time devoted to “reading” and a separate time of the day devoted to “Writers’ Workshop” or “writing.” And it’s not just that reading and writing are separated temporally; they are also separated conceptually. I often observe a Writers’ Workshop in the afternoon that bears no clear relationship to the reading students experienced in the morning. For example, in reading time, students might be reading one genre, and in writing time, they might be writing another. In reading, there might be a lesson about chunking



Project-based learning is for all students, not just for older students or gifted students.

words to decode them, but in writing time the strategy of chunking words to encode them is not presented.

What I find most vexing about the temporal and conceptual separation of reading and writing in elementary school schedules is that I rarely meet anyone interested in defending it. I think we all know at some level that reading and writing are reciprocal processes and that instruction is likely to be most powerful when they are treated as such. Indeed, research reveals a variety of ways in which reading and writing are integrally related.¹⁶ For example, a recent meta-analysis (quantitative research synthesis) found that writing instruction actually improves reading,¹⁷ and, not surprisingly, another study found that more effective teachers have students writing more of the time.¹⁸

A careful read of state standards documents often reveals ways in which they lend themselves to integrating reading and writing. Consider, for example, this pair of first-grade standards from the CCSS (emphasis added):

- **Reading Standards for Informational Text, Standard 8:** Identify the *reasons an author gives to support points* in a text.
- **Writing, Standard 1:** Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, *state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion*, and provide some sense of closure.

Or these pairs of standards from grade 5 (emphasis added):

► **Pair 1:**

- **Reading Standards for Informational Text, Standard 2:** Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; *summarize the text.*
- **Writing, Standard 8:** Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; *summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work,* and provide a list of sources.

► **Pair 2:**

- **Reading Standards for Informational Text, Standard 6:** Analyze *multiple accounts of the same event or topic,* noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.
- **Writing, Standard 7:** Conduct short research projects that use *several sources* to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

These close connections between reading and writing standards at the same grade level lend support to instructional approaches that integrate reading and writing, as projects can do.

So the fact that project-based learning allows us to integrate reading and writing is one of its strengths. Now, as educators, you may be required to, or just choose to, continue to devote separate parts of your students' day to reading and to writing, in which case your project-based time may be the one part of your day that does not have that separation. Or you may find that project-based learning leads you to reorganize your day without separating reading and writing. Your decision should be based on the constraints and preferences of your teaching situation.

Designing Project-Based Units

The first step in designing a unit to address informational reading and writing is to think about your instructional goals. These are not the goals students will have for the project, but rather the goals that you have for the unit as a teacher. They may include:

- Addressing specific standards for informational reading and writing.
- Developing specific knowledge, attitudes, and/or skills beyond those identified in the standards.
- Building on strengths and addressing weaknesses you have observed through assessment or observation.
- Having students read and write a specific genre or genres.
- Addressing standards in one or more specific domains (science, social studies, mathematics).
- Taking advantage of specific student interests and assets (particular areas of strength or expertise).
- Capitalizing on families' interests and assets.

Ideally, a unit arises from a combination of several of these goals. For example, you might have done some writing prompts at the beginning of the school year that suggested a strong need for more instruction in teaching informative/explanatory writing. You might then have identified several specific standards that deal with informative/explanatory reading and writing that you want to address. You might also have noticed that, despite your best efforts, students in your class who are not native to the United States feel marginalized in the classroom and school, so you want

to develop a project that will position them as experts and change others' knowledge of and attitudes toward them. You are also cognizant of some geography standards for the grade level that you want to address.

These factors might give rise to a "Country of Origin" project. In this project, each student would conduct research, write, and present an informative/explanatory text about his or her country of origin or another country of his or her choice. Each student would make a presentation to an audience consisting of not only classmates but also other students in the school and key invited members of the local community.

With your instructional goals in place, it is time to identify the students' purpose for the project. To that end, I like to start by thinking about the situations outside of school in which people read and write the kinds of text I want students to read and write. For example, I might ask myself, "In what situations do people read and write how-to or procedural text?" (Some answers: when they are building something, when they are learning how to oper-

The close connections between reading and writing standards lend support to instructional approaches that integrate reading and writing, as projects can do.



ate something, when they are cooking, when they are carrying out procedures in a lab, and so on.)

With those kinds of situations in mind, I think about a real-world problem that could be solved, a need that could be addressed, or a question that could be answered with that kind of text. For example, I might think, “Because many senior citizens in our community don’t know how to operate some of the digital devices they would like to use, students could write directions for how to operate them.” Or I might think, “Because the city’s science museum has designed exhibits with investigations for visitors to carry out, students could design and write procedures for how to do that.” I think deeply about what is interesting and engaging to students, as that is essential to a successful project.

A project’s purpose can be close to home, as in those examples, or it can be far away, as in projects about ensuring adequate clean water supplies in another country, protecting endangered habitats across the globe, or teaching children elsewhere in the world about U.S. history. When coming up with a purpose, you should

consider problems, needs, or questions in your school, in your community, around the country, or around the world. You may also wish to consider your connections and resources (people you know in the community, partnerships with your school, and so on), businesses and organizations in the community, students’ and families’ interests and assets, and upcoming events and opportunities.

Regarding this last point, sometimes it is not a problem or need that gives rise to a project, but an opportunity. Perhaps your students have kindergarten buddies, and you see an opportunity for them to write books to read to those children. Perhaps there is a festival coming up in the community, and you see an opportunity for students to share what they’re learning with people who would be interested. The most important thing is that *students* see the project as having a real purpose for reading, writing, and learning beyond just satisfying a school requirement.

Once you have identified a purpose for the project, it is time to think, ideally along with students, about the final product they will create. (The final product could be a written text, such as a book or magazine, or it could be a video, an audiofile, or something else.) If, for example, the purpose of the project is to encourage people to make greater use of a local park in danger of being shut down for lack of use, persuasive texts make sense. And, from there, you must determine the type of persuasive text—fliers or advertisements for the park, a letter to a newspaper or local online news site, a promotional video about the park (based on a written script and storyboard), a pamphlet about the park, and so on.

Resist the temptation to keep falling back on books as a format that students write. Although I have observed many successful projects in which students produced books, I have also seen successful projects in which they produced other types of text. Consider the following types of text: pamphlets, brochures, booklets, magazines, blog posts, guides, advertisements, fliers, posters, signs, commercials, promotional videos, informative or documentary videos, promotional websites, informative websites, letters, and e-mails.

Informational text written for a project should have an audience that is going to read, view, and/or use the text students produce for its intended purpose. That audience will vary by genre. For example, an authentic audience for a procedural or how-to text would be people who don’t know how to carry out a particular procedure and want or need to know how to do it; an authentic audience for a persuasive text would be people who could potentially be persuaded or convinced by the argument students make.

A word of caution: sometimes educators develop projects with fake, or inauthentic, purposes and audiences. For example, one project I came across had students create a travel brochure to persuade people to take a vacation on a planet in the solar system other than Earth. Given that no audience of which I am aware is actually going to take a vacation to another planet, to whom are students actually writing and for what purpose? The audience and purpose are undermined.

Although these kinds of projects may seem motivating—and they are likely better than writing for no purpose or audience at all—research suggests they are not as compelling as reading and writing experiences that address a real question or solve a real problem for a real audience.

The most important thing is that *students* see the project as having a real purpose for reading, writing, and learning.





Structuring Project-Based Units to Develop Informational Reading and Writing

I generally advocate that elementary school teachers and students new to project-based instruction begin project-based units with 15 to 20 sessions, and approximately 45 minutes per session. (I use the term “session” rather than “lesson” because there is more going on than just lessons.) The units are made up of five major phases; the first and last phases are typically only one session each, and the middle three phases may be five to seven sessions each:

1. The **project launch** phase establishes the purpose of and audience for the project.
2. The **reading and research** phase mainly involves building necessary background knowledge and gathering information for the project.
3. The **writing and research** phase primarily focuses on drafting the product of the project and conducting additional research as needed.
4. The **revision and editing** phase involves making improvements to the product.
5. The **presentation and celebration** phase involves reaching the intended audience with the product and celebrating that accomplishment.

These phases are not rigid—students will do some writing during the reading and research phase and some, or considerable, reading during the writing and research phase—but they provide a general guide.

Within each session, I recommend a three-part structure:

- **Whole-class lessons** (10–15 minutes): The teacher provides explicit instruction about one or more teaching points aligned with the standards and related to the unit project, often reading

aloud a text or text excerpt as part of this teaching.

- **Small-group, partner, and/or individual work** (25–30 minutes): The teacher provides instruction and support for needs-based small groups and/or circulates throughout the classroom coaching students as they engage in work related to the unit project.
- **Whole-class wrap-up** (about 5 minutes): The teacher pulls the class back together as a whole, reviews key instructional points from the whole-class lesson, and leads the sharing of student work as it reflects those key points.

Why these three components with these time allocations? Regarding the whole-class lesson, research shows over and over again how valuable it is to provide explicit instruction in what we want students to learn, whether it is comprehension strategies, writing strategies, vocabulary, text structures, writing mechanics, or the like.¹⁹ The whole-class lesson is a time to do that, as well as to use other research-supported instructional techniques, such as text-based discussion and sharing of mentor texts.²⁰

Regarding the small-group, partner, and/or individual work, we know that students need lots of time every day to engage in

Projects with inauthentic purposes are not as compelling as reading and writing experiences that address a real question or solve a real problem.

reading and writing with the teacher available to coach and support individually and in small groups.²¹ We want this to be our largest chunk in a session because research shows that one of the characteristics of more-effective schools and teachers is that they have students in small groups more of the time and spend more time engaged in coaching, rather than telling.²² We also want students to be engaged in cooperative or collaborative activities during this time, as a number of studies indicate that this significantly increases literacy achievement.²³

Although I do not know of any research specifically testing the impact of the whole-class wrap-up, I believe it too is an essential component of project sessions. Many students need review and reinforcement of content they have been taught in whole-class lessons.* They also need opportunities to reflect on how they applied that content during small-group, partner, and/or individual work time and to see how others did so. I think of the whole-class wrap-up as allowing us to pull a thread through from the beginning of a session to the end. So, for example, if you did a lesson on ascertaining the meaning of unfamiliar

(Continued on page 42)

*For more on strategies to reinforce learning, see “Strengthening the Student Toolbox,” in the Fall 2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/fall2013/dunlosky.

Growing the Next Generation

A Program Encourages Students of Color to Become Teachers



BY BETTYE PERKINS

In a country with an increasing population of nonwhite students, there are far too few teachers of color. The numbers are particularly distressing when it comes to finding male teachers of color, who are essential role models for black boys. As a result, black and Latino children sitting in classrooms with white teachers, day after day and year after year, can't help but get the message: teaching, and the educational attainment and authority it reflects, is not for people like them.

More than 20 years ago, the lack of diversity in the teaching force prompted me to start Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers (TSTT), an organization that taps diverse and economically challenged students to consider teaching as a profession.*

To find future teachers of color, TSTT relies on teachers and

Bettye Perkins is the founder and chief executive officer of Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers. A former middle school teacher, she was an executive with IBM for 20 years.

guidance counselors who know their students best and, as a result, are TSTT's primary recruiters. Our program then helps to nurture and mentor these students every step of the way, from high school through college. There are no shortcuts; this work requires extensive amounts of time and effort. But the payoff is great.

TSTT currently enrolls nearly 300 high school students who come from more than 45 high schools in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia. The program also enrolls more than 300 college students who attend 21 partner institutions.

Our students are ethnically and socioeconomically diverse: approximately 47 percent are African American, 35 percent are Hispanic or Latino, 13 percent are white, and 3 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander. Twenty-three percent are male, and 75 percent

The above photo and the ones that follow show students participating in various Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers events.

*To learn more about TSTT, visit www.tstt.org.

are the first in their families to attend college. Since its inception, TSTT has succeeded in placing more than 150 men and women of color in classrooms across the country.

Humble Beginnings

I never imagined I would develop a program that would have such a profound impact on children of color, children like me and my brothers and sisters.

I grew up in acute poverty in the small, segregated town of Gadsden, South Carolina. My father died when I was 5, leaving my mother to raise six children alone. My mom worked tirelessly as a housecleaner and a nanny, the few occupations available to her. She even pressed soldiers' uniforms at a nearby army base.

Since my mother worked long hours, we children spent a lot of extra time at school, where teachers looked after us. One teacher, Mrs. Anderson, took me under her wing. She encouraged me to join the Future Educators of America club. Thanks to her, I found my calling. The desire to be a teacher, along with her encouragement, motivated me to graduate from high school and college.

After I earned my teaching certification in 1970, I felt I was on my way. I was keenly aware that I had far surpassed my parents' educational level, since I was the first in my family to graduate from college.

I took a job teaching middle school, about an hour from where I grew up. Life was quiet but good. While grading papers one Sunday afternoon, I was listening to the radio. James Clyburn, then the state's human affairs commissioner and now a Democratic congressman from South Carolina, came on the air. He talked about how IBM was looking for qualified applicants. I had never heard of IBM, but I was intrigued by Clyburn's message; he urged young black men and women to seek opportunities that he and others were working hard to make possible.

Soon after that radio address, I called IBM and landed an interview. I was offered a job on the spot—as a secretary. I quickly turned that down, seeing it as a step below teaching. But a few days later IBM called me back. Would I consider another position? One where I would work with customers along with the sales and marketing staff? That sounded interesting. I was young, curious, and thought I had nothing to lose. I signed on in 1975 in Columbia, South Carolina, 20 miles from Gadsden.

Ultimately, James Clyburn changed the trajectory of my life. Even though my new path led me away from education, the attention I had received from my teachers prepared me for other job opportunities.

IBM was fascinating. While working in Columbia, and in Atlanta, Georgia, I held jobs in marketing, management, and personnel. I also worked as a systems analyst. After numerous promotions, I was eventually transferred to the national headquarters in Armonk, New York—a long way from my hometown.

In Armonk, I was asked to lead a management and executive training program where I designed courses taken by more than 60,000 managers and other leaders, including school superintendents. I was teaching again! I remembered the sense of fulfillment I had felt as an English teacher so many years ago.

At this point (1993), I had spent nearly 20 years at IBM. I realized I was restless and ready for a new purpose. After meeting the superintendents in the training program, I thought, "I could do that!" By becoming a superintendent, I could unite my early train-

ing and love of education with my management experience. The first step would be to obtain a principal's license. So I enrolled in a program at Pace University.

One of my professors at Pace introduced me to Robert Roelle, the superintendent in Ossining, New York, a small community in Westchester County. He invited me to complete my required internship in his district, where the enrollment was about 23 percent black at the time yet the faculty included very few black teachers. He asked me to focus on minority teacher recruitment.

During my internship, I researched the issue and came up with a few short- and long-term strategies, including starting a future teachers club, so the district could "grow its own" minority teachers. After hearing this idea, Roelle asked me to make a presentation to neighboring superintendents. They were intrigued.

Shortly after my presentation, I left IBM and worked as a consultant to start future teachers clubs in two high schools in northern Westchester. I recruited students of color and gave them experience tutoring other children, with their own classroom teachers as mentors. I soon saw that the students I recruited felt

If I could light a spark in high school and nurture that flame through college, I knew I could produce excellent teachers who would stick with the profession.

isolated, so I began to bring together students from different high schools across Westchester under the banner Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers.

After I earned my master's degree in educational administration and supervision at Pace, I enrolled at Fordham University, still on a path to becoming a superintendent. The chair of the graduate school and my dissertation mentor, Barbara Jackson, suggested I document the work I was doing with minority students for my doctoral dissertation, which I completed at Fordham in 2003.

I continued to focus on the design, development, and implementation of TSTT. I kept recruiting high school students from racially and culturally diverse and economically disadvantaged families. I gave students individual attention, found them teacher mentors, and arranged internships where they could work with younger children. I took them on college visits and helped them with their college applications. I watched my first cohort of high school graduates go off to college, with a sigh of relief and a swell of pride.

However, I quickly realized they would need continued mentoring and financial support to succeed in college. I knew that I needed



to find a way to see them through. Armed with a little marketing experience, I began to call on college presidents in the area to support these students. I asked them to give a minimum 50 percent tuition scholarship to qualified TSTT high school graduates who met admissions standards. Miraculously, they agreed.

The scholarships were a big incentive. I then formalized what high school students would need to do to qualify, which included working as a teacher back in a TSTT school for at least one year after becoming certified.

During TSTT's first years, I had worked with high school juniors and seniors. But I realized I needed more time to recruit, mentor, and train students to ensure their academic success, so I decided to enroll students as early as ninth grade. I wanted students to have more time to see if teaching was a good fit. The earlier start also enabled me to help students prepare for college.

To me, teaching is a calling. Especially in some urban districts or isolated rural areas, it's imperative that teachers be caring, committed, and competent. If I could light a spark in high school and nurture that flame through college, I knew I could produce excellent, dedicated teachers who would stick with the profession. And even if not all our recruits became teachers, the attention and mentoring we provided would help them reap benefits no matter what path they pursued.

I watched and learned, and strengthened the program. Eventually, TSTT became my doctoral thesis. As part of my dissertation, I researched nearly 245 future teacher programs across the country and discovered that none continued to provide the necessary financial and emotional support students so desperately needed to complete college. In writing my dissertation, I realized I had created a new model. In 1999, I incorporated TSTT as a nonprofit organization.

My background at IBM provided me with the skills to approach businesses and banks to fund TSTT. I explained that an educated workforce would benefit the community and increase workplace diversity. I also explained the enormous power of a great teacher and the need for more effective teachers and role models who could help students reach their potential.

If corporations want capable workers, they should financially support students of color who demonstrate the potential to graduate from college.

I acknowledged that not all TSTT graduates would become teachers, and that some would change course and enter careers in business, finance, law, or other professions. I said that if corporations wanted capable, prepared workers for the future, then they should not only invest in teachers to inspire and train the next generation, but also financially support students of color who had demonstrated the potential to graduate from college and become productive citizens.

Businesses and foundations responded favorably. Many gave me the funding to strengthen the program and support students through college.

The program first expanded throughout the Greater Hudson Valley region in New York state. Then JPMorgan Chase, an early supporter, approached us about replicating it elsewhere.

TSTT works thanks to regional advisory councils, led by a regional coordinator. The council includes representatives from each TSTT participating school district—preferably superintendents, a representative from area college partners, TSTT representatives (including the executive director), and business and/or community representatives. Each district has a mentor who serves on the advisory council, acts as a liaison to TSTT on program policies and procedures, and assists with recruitment of



teacher mentors and hiring of TSTT teachers. Regional program managers, coordinators, and team leaders also implement the model in each area, while our headquarters in White Plains, New York, provides oversight.

The districts we partner with vary in size and location. For instance, Ossining, our first TSTT partner, is a small district with fewer than 5,000 students. Another of our partners, Prince William County Public Schools in Northern Virginia, has 87,000 students and 12 high schools.

When school officials in Prince William were looking to hire minority teachers, they invited me to speak with their school board. That was nine years ago. TSTT is now part of the district's "Growing Our Own" initiative designed to hire former students. The district plans to hire 1,000 teachers this school year, and it will rely on TSTT for qualified candidates of color who will help the district achieve its goal of diversifying the teaching staff.

In addition to growing geographically, TSTT has launched a male teacher of color initiative to help fill the shortage of African American and Latino male teachers. Sadly, African American male teachers account for only 2 percent of today's educator workforce.¹

Two years ago, we also launched a middle school program in Westchester called the Student Leadership Movement (SLM) to recruit potential teachers earlier. SLM links middle school students with TSTT high school students who act as tutors and mentors as well as encourage them to consider becoming teachers.

A New and Comprehensive Model

TSTT provides a comprehensive, eight-year-plus teacher preparation program designed to recruit, mentor, and train low-income, ethnically diverse students from high school through college, and place them in teaching jobs in their communities. Because of its ability to not only recruit but retain teachers of color, the program is one of eight focused on increasing diversity that are highlighted in "The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education," a report published by the Albert Shanker Institute. (For more on the report, see page 18.)

After 20 years, the program has enabled me to meet hundreds of kindred souls who share the passion and purpose of helping our next generation to succeed. Ray Sanchez now serves as the superintendent in Ossining, where the first TSTT program began. Last year, when we honored the district at our 20th-anniversary breakfast, he said, "I'm a believer. TSTT is an investment in the future."

Today, just like in 1995, the district is still very concerned about diversifying its teaching staff. Over the years, the district has hired 14 former students of color, six of whom were recruited and mentored by me. I'm proud to say they have been teaching for more than 10 years.

To remain eligible for participation in the TSTT program, students must maintain a B+ average by the end of their senior year of high school, engage in job shadowing and summer internships, tutor two hours each week during the school year, attend regional TSTT workshops, and commit to teach in a participating school district for one year after receiving teaching credentials.

Participants meet weekly with peers, a TSTT program manager, and a teacher mentor. They engage in character development activities, as well as goal-setting and service learning opportunities. Students learn study and time-management skills, and they participate in team-building activities.

Students also plan for college and visit campuses. They receive admissions guidance and SAT preparation training. And because this program is geared toward preparing future teachers, students learn about what teaching entails. They study lesson planning and curriculum mapping, media and technology in education, conflict resolution strategies, and diversity issues in the classroom.

Once in college, students are assigned a mentor, usually an administrator or a professor. They return to their home districts for check-ins, mock interviews, resumé guidance, portfolio presentations, and professional etiquette workshops. TSTT also helps place college students in teaching-related summer internships.

By the time TSTT students earn their teaching certifications, they are ready to work, and TSTT helps them land a job, often at one of our more than 50 partner schools. TSTT graduates proudly



TSTT graduates proudly tell me they are often better prepared for college and teaching careers than their classmates.

tell me they are often better prepared for college and teaching careers than their classmates. And superintendents tell me that if they see an applicant is a TSTT graduate, they are confident in hiring that individual.

Currently, school districts pay a per-student fee of \$3,000 to join the program. Each district agrees to identify ninth-graders who have the academic and leadership skills to succeed as teachers, along with a willingness to explore the teaching profession.

The mentor-mentee relationship is one of the program's strengths. We pay our mentors, who follow our curriculum. Over the years, many mentors and students have become friends, colleagues, and part of a strong support network that lasts long after the formal program ends. The students' relationships with mentors are among the reasons why the program has such high retention rates.

Of the high school students who have enrolled in TSTT over the years, more than 90 percent complete the eight-year program. Of those students, 97 percent go on to college, and nearly 80 per-

cent graduate from college, with about half of those students becoming teachers. (For TSTT success stories, see page 17.)

TSTT has a 100 percent job placement rate for highly qualified graduates who attend good teacher preparation programs. If they earn the TSTT "stamp of approval," they will get a job.

While teacher turnover is a huge problem across the country, TSTT graduates stay in the classroom longer than average. In January 2015, the Center for American Progress reported that, nationally, 30 percent of teachers leave teaching within five years,² but only 10 percent of TSTT teachers do so. And only 7 percent of TSTT teachers leave the teaching profession within three years, compared with the national rate of 20 percent.

TSTT sets high expectations for students, who rise to the level we set. We show students we care about them, and we stay with them for eight years. We witness their trials and tribulations, and we become their true champions. Because of TSTT, our students understand the value of giving back.

As the first in my family to complete college, I am driven every day to help another young person be the first in his or her family to do so. Part of my drive also stems from wanting to play a significant role in improving educational outcomes for the next generation. I tell TSTT students to remember the purpose of their work and to be sure their love and passion shine through in all that they do.

Thanks to TSTT, I discovered my God-given purpose in life and forgot about becoming a superintendent. What a blessing! □

Endnotes

1. "Number and Percentage Distribution of Teachers in Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Selected Teacher Characteristics: Selected Years, 1987–88 Through 2011–12," in National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2014, table 209.10.
2. Robert Hanna and Kaitlin Pennington, "Despite Reports to the Contrary, New Teachers Are Staying in Their Jobs Longer," Center for American Progress, January 8, 2015, www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/news/2015/01/08/103421/despite-reports-to-the-contrary-new-teachers-are-staying-in-their-jobs-longer.

Success Stories from Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers

In 1995, **Jeffrey Cole** was one of TSTT's first recruits. At the time, he was an unmotivated high school student in Westchester County, New York. According to his worried mother, he had no particular career goals.

Thanks to his guidance counselor's encouragement, he joined TSTT, a new program that tapped diverse and economically challenged students to consider teaching as a profession. Jeffrey soon found himself in a summer internship tutoring younger children—and he loved it. He went on to attend college on a scholarship arranged through TSTT. He eventually became an elementary school teacher and is now an assistant director of special education in a large urban school district.

One of the first TSTT graduates to reach the 10-year mark in the teaching profession is **Emerly Martinez**. After college, he returned to teach social studies in the high school from which he graduated, and he is now an assistant principal in a nearby district.

Among the most enthusiastic of TSTT's participants is **Merica Neufville**. She likes to tell me, "TSTT saved me!" Born in Jamaica, her mother moved the family, after the death of Merica's father, to the United States, where her mother worked many jobs to support her family. Merica also worked to help pay bills. She hoped to attend college but thought it would take years to save enough money.

When TSTT came to her large urban school, she joined as one of the first recruits. At her school, guidance counselors had little time for individual students, so the program helped her prepare for college, and the 50 percent tuition scholarship made the difference in her enrolling. We supported her through good days and bad and eventually helped her get a job as a math teacher in a TSTT district. She immediately became a teacher mentor to "pay it forward," giving advice, support, and encouragement to the program's participants.

Today, she stays in touch with many of the students she has mentored. Their relationships have become genuine friendships; she recently organized a bridal shower for one of her former students, and she meets with others throughout the year. We need dedicated teachers like Merica in the poorest, least resourced districts so they can provide students with the education to help them climb out of poverty.

Merica is currently an administrator, pursuing a doctorate in education leadership; she is one of our many success stories.

—B.P.

Emerly Martinez and
Bettye Perkins



Jeffrey Cole



Merica Neufville

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TSTT

A Look at Teacher Diversity

BY THE ALBERT SHANKER INSTITUTE

More than 60 years after the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* was handed down, its promise remains unfulfilled. In many respects, America's public schools continue to be "separate and unequal." Indeed, the growing resegregation of American schools by race and ethnicity, compounded by economic class segregation, has become the dominant trend in American education.

Recent research documenting this growing school segregation has received some public attention (though arguably less than such a weighty matter should command).¹ Comparatively little attention has been paid to an important related issue, however—the state of racial and ethnic diversity in America's teaching force. For the general public, basic facts about teacher diversity are difficult to understand or inaccessible.

The Albert Shanker Institute, working with Richard Ingersoll of the University of Pennsylvania, undertook the challenge of pulling together what research there is, and conducting original research where data were lacking, in order to provide a factual basis for public discussion and further research.

In September 2015, the institute published *The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education*, a major report (summarized here) that found teacher diversity in the United States to be an area of concern. The teacher workforce has become less ethnically and racially diverse and more female over time, a development that has adversely affected students, particularly males of color.

Based on Ingersoll's national analysis of data, limited progress toward greater diversity is being made, but not nearly enough to meet the need for more teachers of color.

The Albert Shanker Institute is committed to four fundamental principles: vibrant democracy, quality public education, a voice for working people in decisions affecting their jobs and their lives, and free and open debate about all of these issues. This article is excerpted from The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education, which the institute published in 2015. Richard M. Ingersoll, a professor of education and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, contributed to this report. To read the full report, see www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/teacherdiversity.

Research Supports Teacher Diversity as Crucial for Student Success

Existing research makes a compelling case for the benefits of a diverse teacher workforce, in which "minority" racial and ethnic groups—African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders—would be much more robustly represented. While there is reason to

stereotypes, attenuate unconscious implicit biases, and promote cross-cultural social bonding.⁵

- All students benefit from being educated by teachers from a variety of different backgrounds, races, and ethnic groups, as this experience better prepares them to succeed in an increasingly diverse society.⁶

Teachers of color remain significantly underrepresented relative to the students they serve.

believe that students of color would be the greatest beneficiaries of a diverse teaching force, evidence suggests that all students—and our democracy at large—would benefit from a teaching force that reflects the full diversity of the U.S. population. The research finds that:

- Teachers of color can be more motivated to work with disadvantaged minority students in high-poverty, racially and ethnically segregated schools, a factor that may help reduce rates of teacher attrition in hard-to-staff schools.²
- Teachers of color tend to have higher academic expectations for minority students, which can result in increased academic and social growth among students.³
- Students of color profit from having individuals from their own racial and ethnic group, who can serve as academically successful role models and who can have greater knowledge

of their heritage culture, among their teachers.⁴

- Positive exposure to individuals from a variety of races and ethnic groups, especially in childhood, can help reduce

Teacher Diversity: The National Picture

Nationally, progress is being made toward a more diverse teaching force, but at a relatively modest pace. Over the 25-year period from 1987 to 2012, the minority share of the American teaching force—including African American, Latino, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and multiracial teachers—has grown from 12 percent to 17 percent.⁷ The minority share of the American student population also grew during these 25 years, albeit not at the same tempo as increases among minority teachers. Students of color now account for more than half of all public school students.

As a consequence of this growing student population, however, progress toward reducing the substantial representation gaps between teachers of color and students of color has been limited. Teachers of color remain significantly underrepresented relative to the students they serve.

The most significant impediment to increasing the diversity of the teacher workforce is not found in the recruitment and hiring of teachers of color: nationally, they are being hired at a higher proportional rate than other teachers. Rather, the problem lies in attrition: *teachers of color are leaving the profession at a higher rate than other teachers.*

Moreover, teachers of color are not



evenly distributed across schools. They tend to be concentrated in urban schools serving high-poverty, minority communities. But analyses of survey data show that they are not leaving the profession at a higher rate because of the poverty or the race and ethnicity of their students. Instead, *they are leaving because of the working conditions in their schools*. Their strongest complaints relate to a lack of collective voice in educational decisions and a lack of professional autonomy in the classroom.

Teacher Diversity in Nine Cities

As part of the larger study, the Albert Shanker Institute selected nine cities—Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.—to examine the state of racial and ethnic diversity in their teaching workforces. These nine cities followed the national patterns of teacher diversity in their broadest strokes. As a general rule, teachers of color—especially males—are underrepresented in these urban workforces, with substantial representation gaps between minority teachers and minority students.⁸ These patterns are generally more manifest for African American and Latino teachers than for Asians, and more pronounced in charter schools than in district schools.

When examining teacher diversity trends over the course of the 10 years in our study—from 2002 to 2012—a number of disquieting trends become evident. In all nine cities studied, the African American share of the teacher workforce declined, at rates from the very small to the quite large—from roughly 1 percent in Boston’s charter sector and Cleveland’s district sector, to more than 24 percent in New Orleans and nearly 28 percent in Washington, D.C. (combined sectors—i.e., district schools and charter schools combined). Losses in the number of African American teachers were even greater, ranging from a low of 15 percent in New York City to a high of 62 percent in New Orleans.⁹ The available evidence suggests that seniority-based layoffs played little or no role in these declines.

In the nine cities we studied, trends for Latino teachers were more positive than those for African American teachers but still well short of the need. Over the course of the 10 years in our study, the Latino shares of the teacher workforces were basically stable or showed modest growth. The one exception was Los Angeles, where the Latino share of the teacher population

grew markedly in both the district and charter sectors. In contrast to African American teachers, the actual numbers of Latino teachers in the cities also grew during these years, with Cleveland being the lone exception. However, given that Latinos currently represent the fastest-growing share of the American student population, substantial additional growth of the Latino teaching force would be required to narrow the representation gap with Latino students.

While the analysis of the national data points to high attrition rates as the main obstacle to improving the diversity of the teaching force, the underrepresentation of African American and Latino teachers among new hires also appears to be a serious problem. Approaches to improving teacher diversity in these cities will need to address teacher recruitment, hiring, and retention.

Across our nine cities, teachers of all races and ethnicities tended to teach in schools with high concentrations of low-income students of color. As a general rule, African American and Latino teachers taught in schools with at least modestly higher concentrations of low-income and minority students.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are aimed at federal-, state-, and district-level policymakers, working collaboratively with local teachers unions and communities:

- *Address the serious problem of a lack of accurate data:* As part of its Civil Rights Data Collection, the U.S. Department of Education should collect and report data on the race and ethnicity of the teaching force in all public schools, district and charters alike.
- *Review education-related legislation and policy for their impact on teacher diversity,* and amend or modify them to promote diversification and avoid the unintended consequence of diminishing diversity.
- *Invest in high-quality teacher education programs* at the nation’s historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and public colleges and universities serving large numbers of minority students.
- *Incentivize close partnerships* between colleges of education and school districts/charter networks to provide

mentoring, support, and training in culturally responsive practices to all novice teachers.

- *Support the development and expansion of evidence-based programs* to help recruit, mentor, support, and retain minority teachers, including “grow your own” teacher preparation programs.*
- *Use contract negotiations as a vehicle for increasing teaching diversity,* incorporating programs and features, such as paraprofessional career ladders, that serve to increase teacher diversity.
- *Incorporate recruitment and hiring practices into accountability systems* for the leadership and staff of school districts and charter networks.

(Endnotes on page 43)

*See Section V of the full report for descriptions of such programs. One of these eight programs profiled is Today’s Students Tomorrow’s Teachers, a “grow your own” model described on page 12.



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The Case for a Teacher Like Me



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

BY HARRY F. PRESTON V

It's safe to say that as a black male teacher of high school engineering, I am considered an anomaly. If you dig through all of the statistics about black male teachers nationwide and compare them with the number of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teachers of color, you will find very few teachers like me.

My uniqueness is predicated on a few heartbreaking numbers. The 2012–2013 high school graduation rate for black males was

59 percent, compared with 80 percent for white males.¹ The college graduation rate for black males is also abysmal: of students entering college in 2008, only 35 percent of black males completed their degrees within six years, compared with 60 percent of white males.² Given these statistics, it's hardly surprising that only 2 percent of the entire teaching population is comprised of black males.³ And while 16 percent of public school students are black, of students who earned bachelor's degrees in STEM fields in 2013–2014, just 4 percent were African American males.⁴

Keeping in mind all of the socioeconomic and other factors that contribute to these statistics, simple math suggests that a teacher like me has a very slim chance of existing. And yet here I am, a black male high school teacher of science in Baltimore City Public Schools.

* * *

I've had my share of twists and turns in my educational trajectory. I was raised in Columbia, South Carolina, where I attended an

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elementary school led by a black male principal (another anomaly). He and I spent many a day together, so much so that I even had my own desk in his office. Let's just say I was a very inquisitive and energetic child.

The passing of years and shifting perspectives have certainly changed my understanding as to why I spent so much time in the principal's office. I remember for the most part being a happy child but very different from my classmates and my teachers. I was one of the few black students at my school, and my family was not as affluent as the families of my peers. As a child, I could not grasp entirely how socioeconomic differences affected my relationships with my classmates; however, I recall seeing the houses and cars of my classmates' parents, and I knew we were from different worlds.

In class, I recall having difficulty understanding the need to follow certain directions or why I had to wait to do things. As an enthusiastic student, I wanted to learn on my own terms and in my own ways. I wanted to move faster at times, but at other times I needed to move more slowly. I usually learned quickly, and my pace rarely matched that of my classmates. Once I felt I had mastered a subject or a concept, I had trouble staying patient until my peers caught up with me. But instead of being placed in a more challenging environment, I was often called a "difficult child." Even as a young child, the label stung.

It wasn't until I became a teacher that I understood my experience was not unique. My story is similar to the stories of many other black males in schools with precious few black male teachers.*

Only recently have researchers and policymakers decried the significant numbers of black boys being labeled disruptive and/or hyperactive, and the dearth of these students being accepted into honors and/or gifted programs. These negative labels, compounded with the lack of opportunities for black boys to flex their mental prowess, generate a cycle of referrals and suspensions that lower students' self-esteem and impede student learning.†

In a system that has too often viewed black males negatively, these students especially need educational role models to help guide them.

*For more on the importance of black males in the classroom, see "The Need for More Teachers of Color" in the Summer 2015 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/summer2015/vilson.

†For more on school discipline and related statistics, see "From Reaction to Prevention" in the Winter 2015–2016 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/skiba_losen.

When I was a child, my principal was that role model for me. He knew all the right things to say to keep me on track. At the time, I felt he understood me in ways my other teachers never did. Throughout the rest of my elementary and secondary education, I didn't have another black male leader or teacher until Benedict College, a historically black college in Columbia, South Carolina, where I majored in physics. I chose the college because I wanted the experience of having faculty members who were black like me.

There, I excelled and graduated with honors in biological and physical sciences. It was a long way from the principal's office.

But that principal was one of the major reasons I later went to Johns Hopkins University to pursue a master's degree in urban education and administration.

Earning my advanced degree in education prompted me to think about my mediocre performance in primary and secondary education and my eventual college success. In high school, I was a middle-of-the-road student who graduated in the middle of my high school class of 300-plus students.

Despite my average grades, I loved science and math; I even read science and math books for fun. I conducted physics experiments at home daily, and I was intrigued by engineering. Yet, my guidance counselor continually recommended I take lower-level, less challenging classes, I assume because of my athletic ability (I played football, wrestled, and ran track). I honestly wanted to believe that was the logic for not encouraging me to take honors classes—which might have only four black students in a class of

It's safe to say that as a black male teacher of high school engineering, I am considered an anomaly.



30. I was lost in a system that was fine with me being lost.

But a summer experience at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, opened up a world of possibilities for me, and I wish all students had access to such a life-changing opportunity. I was able to attend a program focused on encouraging minority male high school students who were interested in engineering to pursue careers in education. For the first time, I was around other students of color who shared a love of science and math.

As a black male teacher in a STEM field, I believe that getting more teachers like me in classrooms today boils down to expectations and access. The truth is that students who are held to higher expectations reach higher levels of success. "Who Believes in Me? The Effect of Student-Teacher Demographic Match on Teacher Expectations," a study published last year by researchers at American University and Johns Hopkins University, bears this out.

The study brought to light some long overlooked issues on the impact of race and educational expectations. In a blog post explaining the findings, one of the study's authors, Seth Gershenson, writes that "when a black student is evaluated by one black teacher and by one non-black teacher, the non-black teacher is about 30 percent less likely to expect that the student will complete a four-year college degree than the black teacher."⁵

"These results are not meant to, nor should they, demonize or implicate teachers," Gershenson continues. "Biases in expectations are generally unintentional and are an artifact of how humans categorize complex information."* The study's findings simply "highlight the need to better understand how teachers form expectations, what types of interventions can reduce or eliminate biases in teacher expectations, and perhaps most importantly, how such expectations and biases affect the long-run student outcomes of ultimate import."⁶

Because I am a black male educator who teaches at an urban high school where almost all of my students receive free or reduced-price meals, I understand the importance of providing access to additional opportunities and supports, as well as to images of success. Students cannot imagine future educational and career opportunities if they've never seen them firsthand.

That's why I never say to my students, "Your only limit is your imagination." To me, the old cliché is inherently biased. Many of my students come from families with so few educational or financial resources that their imaginations are understandably confined by their experiences. And for many black male students in particular, those experiences have been especially limited.

However, in recent years there has been a shift in thinking among young black males regarding careers they can pursue. Thanks largely to the success and popularity of President Obama, young black students are seeing more black professionals in increasingly prominent roles, and as a result, they are beginning to consider pursuing such roles for themselves.

While Obama's presence alone has been inspiring, his My Brother's Keeper program has become possibly the biggest "call

to action" in support of black males.[†] Just as important, U.S. Secretary of Education John King—also a black man—has emphasized the need for more educators of color to help change the trajectory of our black boys. King has shared publicly that the issue is personal for him. In May, I had the distinct honor of introducing him at this year's National Summit on Teacher Diversity in Washington, D.C. The audience and I listened to him describe the profound impact his educators had on his educational path. He stressed in no uncertain terms how important a strong, diverse teaching force is to ensuring our students engage in their learning and personal growth.

Other males of color, such as public intellectuals, can make such an impact as well. For instance, the famous astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, who is of African American and Puerto Rican descent, had a powerful effect on me. Though I never met him, I could really connect with him—something clicked—when he talked about science on television.

That same connection can occur in the classroom. An educator of color can give students of color—especially black males—a concrete image of possibility. To turn that possibility into reality, we must ultimately change the conversation about who's in education—and change who's in the conversation about education. □

An educator of color can give students of color—especially black males—a concrete image of possibility.



Endnotes

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5. Seth Gershenson, "The Alarming Effect of Racial Mismatch on Teacher Expectations," *Brown Center Chalkboard* (blog), Brookings Institution, August 18, 2015, www.brookings.edu/blogs/brown-center-chalkboard/posts/2015/08/18-teacher-expectations-gershenson.
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*For more on biases, see "Understanding Implicit Bias" in the Winter 2015–2016 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/staats.

[†]For more about My Brother's Keeper, see <http://1.usa.gov/1ccwQXO>.

Nurturing Young Readers

How Digital Media Can Promote Literacy Instead of Undermining It



BY LISA GUERNSEY AND MICHAEL H. LEVINE

One morning this spring at Aldersgate KinderPrep in Chesapeake, Virginia, four kindergartners were clustered around an iPad. With their small fingers, they tapped away on a series of apps designed around Mercer Mayer's classic Little Critter books, including well-known titles such as *All by Myself* and *Just Grandma and Me*, with their porcupine-like characters with scruffy hair and big cartoon eyes. Carla Bell, the center's director, sat with the children to observe.

Bell recalls being amazed at how engrossed they were. The kids would touch on a character or a picture, and the app's audio would tell them the corresponding word. "The kids love to touch the

pictures," Bell said. In fact, she added, "they love to do that *a lot*." Soon she found, to her dismay, that the children were spending most of their time hearing one word over and over: "critter, critter, critter, critter."

"I learned from that mistake," Bell said. When she grouped the kids around her the second time, she inserted herself as a guide: First, let's listen to the whole story *without* using the app's interactive elements, she told them. "Then," she said, "we'll go back and we can touch on the words and the pictures."

Young children today are gaining access to a dizzying array of apps, games, and videos. With all of this digital media at their fingertips, two urgent questions have emerged in preschools and elementary schools: Could technology interfere with the way children learn to read? Or could it help?

As brain science shows, the act of reading is not a given for human beings. Maryanne Wolf's landmark book *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* has helped us understand that our brains do not automatically pick up reading the way we, from our very earliest days, start to pick up spoken language. Instead, the brain

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY CATHERINE MEURISSE

has to be trained to read. What kind of training are today's children receiving? Might some young children be experiencing an environment that puts them at a real disadvantage?

These are questions that have animated our teams at New America and the Joan Ganz Cooney Center over the past three years, as we've studied the impact of digital technology on learning and, more specifically, on the teaching of reading. Our research, chronicled in our book *Tap, Click, Read: Growing Readers in a World of Screens*, has prompted us to advocate for a significantly different approach that could help replace the status quo and that tackles the worrisome prospect of increased disparities across socioeconomic groups in this country. In short, our answer is to start much earlier in children's lives with high-quality early education, apply the lessons from the new science of learning, and bring in a "third way" approach to using technology.



talking to babies even before they have the words to respond, and answering their gestures and coos with understanding and elaboration. The more those conversations introduce new words and ways of explaining the world around them, the better: "The flowers are budding. See the petals?" or, "Abuela knitted this little hat for you. It has the same zig-zag pattern as your sweater!"

Once they enter preschool, children are ready for more specific emergent literacy skills. This is where scientific consensus has formed around a two-pronged, skills-plus-knowledge strategy for learning to read: children need exposure to letters, sounds, and the "decoding" of written words *while also* being immersed in stories and interactions that introduce them to the multilayered worlds of science, art, history, literature, different cultures, and more. They need skills *and* knowledge. This two-pronged strategy, most experts agree, should be at the heart of literacy learning everywhere.*

More investment in early childhood must be coupled with a strategy that recognizes the challenges and opportunities of the digital age.

Laying the Foundation for Literacy

Today, more than two-thirds of American students are struggling to comprehend what they read. This statistic, derived from test results from the fourth-grade National Assessment of Educational Progress, is even more sobering when we recognize that these numbers have barely budged for more than 15 years, and billions of dollars have been spent on educational reforms to no avail.¹ For students in underserved populations, such as low-income families, as well as among Hispanics and African Americans, the percentage of students who are not proficient readers reaches up to 80 percent.²

Conventional wisdom tells us that focusing on the basics—letters, sounds, and stories—during the ages of 4, 5, and 6 is the surest way to teach youngsters to read. But new findings from the learning sciences show that becoming a reader is not something that is simply activated during a few years in primary school.³ The skills that promote strong reading are developed within the brain much earlier. In fact, the foundation for becoming a truly literate person—one who not only comprehends the written word but also listens, writes, speaks, and communicates knowledgeably about content and ideas—is built much earlier too.

The precursors of reading begin in infancy, as very young children begin to develop language skills and a growing awareness of how the world works. Children's brains are primed to learn how to speak, listen, and communicate via their back-and-forth interactions with adults and peers. This involves parents and caregivers

With this growing knowledge of the early years, it makes good sense to advocate for deeper and smarter investments in infant and toddler programs, parenting workshops, preschools, elementary schools, libraries, and teacher preparation. Children's language development and reading scores would certainly benefit. But here is where the conclusions from our research take a more controversial turn: more investment in early childhood will not be enough unless it is coupled with a strategy that recognizes the challenges and opportunities of the digital age. The fact is that children are surrounded by technology and media these days. Reports from the Joan Ganz Cooney Center, Common Sense Media, and the journal *Pediatrics* show that, even in low-income families, toddlers and preschoolers are using smartphones and touchscreen tablets on a regular basis.⁴

How do we ensure that this now-ubiquitous technology is harnessed to assist in promoting the two-pronged strategy for learning to read, instead of undermining it? How might digital media be used in service of conversation and rich adult-child interactions, instead of being dismissed as a barrier to those interactions? Today's preschoolers will make up the high school class of 2030, a class of students who will have grown up in a digital world and who will need an even stronger foundation in literacy

*For more on why reading comprehension depends largely on knowledge, see the Spring 2006 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2006.

than many adults have today. Educators and parent-engagement specialists will need answers to these questions if they are going to make a dent in the distressing rates of low reading proficiency among these children and help develop a generation that can thrive in the 21st century.

Understanding Why Disparities Persist

In this magazine four years ago, Susan B. Neuman and Donna C. Celano published an article titled “Worlds Apart: One City, Two Libraries, and Ten Years of Watching Inequality Grow.”[†] It was based on a study they conducted in two Philadelphia libraries, one located in a community of affluence and the other in an economically distressed part of the city. For nearly a decade, they and their research assistants sat in the two libraries, carefully observing how parents and children used the books and computers

they were playing with. Not only were these children benefiting from conversation and an introduction to new skills, they were absorbing information about how computers work and how to use them to gain knowledge and solve problems.

The story of these Philadelphia libraries is now playing out across the country in libraries, schools, and households everywhere. Low-income families and high-income families are tapping into technology at a high rate.

In a recent national survey by the Cooney Center of nearly 1,200 low-income families, more than 90 percent had access to the Internet via a mobile device, and 8 in 10 owned a smartphone with a data plan.⁵ But access to phones and apps is not a panacea. Without recognizing what families really need—without more guidance on the importance of adult-child interactions around media use—technology adoption could widen the gaps between

Without more guidance on adult-child interactions around media use, technology adoption could widen gaps.



within. Even though one of the libraries was in a low-income area, it provided the same level of offerings of books and computers, due to the generosity of a local funder who wanted to level the playing field and give disadvantaged families the same learning opportunities as more well-off Philadelphians.

And yet, as Neuman and Celano recounted, the disparities did not go away. The presence of computers did not suddenly give adults and their children a leg up. In the economically distressed community, Neuman and Celano saw example after example of adults with only rudimentary technology skills struggling to fill out forms or work with new software after waiting in line for their allotted 30 minutes at a computer station. They saw children looking at picture books in short bursts, with few adults around them to guide them through stories and ask them questions. They saw kids playing with computer games that took them off on tangents that had little to do with reading stories or learning new skills, or that were not designed to help them gain confidence or make progress, leading to the pounding of keyboards, frustration, and eventually giving up.

Meanwhile, children at the other library were using computers with an adult by their side, one who had the technological expertise to guide them to appropriate games and early literacy software, not to mention the time to ask them questions about what

families with high levels of education and technology know-how, and families who have very little of either.

One reason for worry emerges from the marketplace where parents and educators are increasingly casting about for help: online app stores. In 2012 and 2014, our teams at the Cooney Center and New America scanned the app stores to learn how early literacy apps are marketed and what features they offer. Our effort, led by Sarah Vaala of Vanderbilt University and Anna Ly, a research fellow and business development expert based at the Cooney Center and Sesame Workshop, analyzed nearly 200 apps targeted to children ages 0–8, with emphasis on early literacy and the top 50 most popular apps in the education sections of those stores. We discovered that few apps were labeled to help parents find particular products for particular ages. Instead, they were often vaguely described as being for “young children,” not recognizing there is a large difference between the needs of a 3-year-old and the needs of a 6-year-old.

We also found very few matches between apps that rise to the top as “most popular” in the app stores and apps that are praised by experts at review sites like Common Sense Media, Parents’ Choice, and *Children’s Technology Review*.[‡] Many of those experts, for example, put a premium on creativity and storytelling, but those kinds of apps are rare in the “most popular” lists in app stores.

The types of skills emphasized by the apps were also problematic. For example, among free apps, more than 50 percent focused

[†]To read the article, visit www.aft.org/ae/fall2012/neuman-celano.

on teaching children to recognize the letters and sounds of the alphabet, while less than 10 percent of free apps focused on reading comprehension, and even rarer were skills like reading fluency (the ability to read without stumbling over certain words) and self-expression.

Another cause for worry comes from confusing messages about how to use media from the experts themselves. For many years, parents and teachers have heard warnings from the American Academy of Pediatrics and other health-related organizations that emphasize the dangers of children consuming media at the expense of social interaction.⁶ The image of a child looking at a screen evokes handwringing and concern: Those poor kids, say the worriers. They are so isolated, addicted, their brains turning to mush. Some

parents, often those in middle- to upper-income demographics, brag that they have never “exposed” their children to a screen.

School- and districtwide adoption of new learning technologies has not gone swimmingly well either. In the Los Angeles Unified School District, for example, educators and families were treated to a debacle regarding tens of thousands of expensive yet unused devices.⁷ And research scientists such as Larry Cuban at Stanford University have presented studies with disappointing results showing the unfulfilled promise of technology integration to drive innovative, effective instructional reforms.⁸ In our observation, most early learning centers and elementary schools are still struggling to sort out how best to deploy research-informed practices in reading blocks within the pre-K to third-grade years.

Models That Use Technology in Early Literacy Learning

Take the case of Innovations for Learning, a nonprofit program that is enabling online tutoring in hundreds of first-grade classrooms in more than 14 school districts. Its system, called TutorMate, recruits tutors from the metropolitan areas around schools—at companies like Boeing, Chase Bank, and Quicken Loans—and connects those tutors with young students who need extra help with reading. Once a week, the tutors call in to the classroom via a computer. Students put on headsets to hear their tutors’ voices, and they spend 30 minutes reading with their tutors in a shared online book that both can see on the screens in front of them. The TutorMate software also works with software called TeacherMate, designed for educators to tailor lessons for individual students and make audio recordings of students reading certain texts.

Recently we learned about Maryetta School, a public school in the rural Oklahoma town of Stilwell. Maryetta is running a program called Literacy3, which focuses on traditional literacy, digital literacy, and Cherokee literacy. With instructional coaching from Gail Lovely, a national expert in early technology, teachers are learning how to help preschoolers use iPads to pull together stories, drawings, and photographs to make their own e-books. These children live in a county with one of the highest rates of poverty in the state. But instead of falling behind, the young students of Maryetta have the chance to leapfrog into the 21st century by learning not only how to read, write, and create in multiple media, but also how to do so in multiple languages.

Other examples focus on reaching parents. Comienza en Casa, a program in Milbridge, Maine, is aimed at helping first-generation Spanish-speaking immigrants create learning environments for their preschoolers. Professionals make

monthly visits to their families’ homes, bringing touchscreen tablets that have been loaded with e-books and games in Spanish. The content is designed to promote adult-child interaction and foster children’s ability to create e-books and tell stories of their own. It also shows families hands-on activities that they can do in their kitchens and backyards to promote vocabulary and problem solving.

In San Francisco’s school district, educators have been experimenting with tailored text messaging for parents. Parents

of pre-K students receive text messages designed by experts at Stanford University containing tips on learning new words and teaching pre-reading skills to their young ones. A report on the program’s effectiveness showed that not only were parents enjoying and using the advice, their children performed better on early literacy assessments than children whose parents didn’t receive the texts. The model has now spread to several other school districts around the country.

—L.G. and M.H.L.

For a fuller review of these models, see our five short videos on www.tapclickread.org and go to <http://atlas.newamerica.org/tech-early-literacy> to browse through an interactive map of the United States (shown below) that profiles and pinpoints more than two dozen initiatives experimenting with new technology.

ATLAS

PREK-12 EDUCATION, EARLY EDUCATION, LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY IN EARLY LITERACY

Mapping tech's integration into initiatives for early literacy and language development. Click on the "..." button below to navigate and use the map filters. And to watch a video on how to navigate the map, click here: [More...](#)

Program Type: All

What is the program type?

- Professional Learning
- Home Visiting/Parent Engagement
- Public Media Partnership
- Center/School Initiative
- Library/Museum

Technology Can Help

Despite these challenges, more than a decade of studies on audiovisual media with young children are also painting a nuanced picture about the conditions under which technologies do, in fact, help. Researchers are finally coming to recognize that digital media are not some monolithic force. There are all sorts of different types of media and different ways of using technology. The content on the screen, the context of how it is used, the way individual children respond to the media, and the communities in which children and families use media—all of this can make a huge difference.

For example, studies show that if the screen is blaring away with background noise or adult-oriented content, toddlers and preschoolers suffer. Background television, and other background media, interfere with conversations with parents and disrupt

Learning starts with the power of the adult-child relationship, and technology is *then* used to support those relationships.

young children’s playing time, which is becoming understood as a key ingredient for their development.⁹

On the other hand, numerous studies have shown that children at very young ages can gain important skills in literacy and language development if the content on the screen is designed for learning.¹⁰ That learning is accentuated and deepened if they have a parent or educator who is using the media with them, talking about what they are doing and seeing. Add in the ways that media might augment the values and assets within long-standing family ties and cultural traditions, and the learning potential grows stronger still. Studies from the Cooney Center with Hispanic-Latino families, for example, have shown that Spanish-language and English-language educational media are rich sources of conversation and learning across generations.

This new research is getting noticed, and the result may be less confusion and more helpful messaging to families in the near future. In October 2015, for example, the American Academy of Pediatrics announced that it would be making changes in the next year to its recommendations on how children use screen time. Representatives from the academy have called for new guidance that is less about avoiding media at all costs and more about guiding parents and teachers to use it to help children learn.

Even before that, the nonprofit organization Zero to Three released the report “Screen Sense,” providing a new set of guidelines for parents and caregivers of infants and toddlers that takes a similar approach.¹¹ And the U.S. Department of Education is

planning to publish a document that synthesizes those findings and more from new research on how to use media in healthy and learning-focused ways.

In the meantime, many educators like Carla Bell, the preschool director in Virginia, are experimenting with digital media out of a sense of both curiosity and obligation to help more children learn using whatever tools they can find. Already, Bell’s experience with the digital “Critter” books has helped her realize that handing children e-books may not be enough. Her center enrolls children from ages 2½ to 5. Teachers of children that age should know how to walk them through a print book, pausing to ask questions and “scaffolding” children’s learning based on what they already know. In the same way, Bell decided that she needed to guide and become more involved with the kindergartners as they



used the story app. “I found that if I didn’t do that,” Bell said, “we never got through the story.” Plus, she said, “I also made the mistake of telling them, ‘You can find the spider guy and lizard guy,’” two little hide-and-seek activities that are part of the story app, “and then they did, and they weren’t paying attention to the print.”

Digital media and literacy do not have to be on this collision course. We should be doing everything we can to enable a shift: media should be used in service of literacy, and our notions of literacy have to evolve to help children master the skills needed to make sense of all kinds of media. If the question is, Can technology help today’s media-immersed children learn to read?, our research over several years tells us the answer is yes—if they are surrounded by adults who know how to help, and introduced to media designed to promote literacy instead of undermining it. We need a third way: a new approach that is human-powered first and tech-assisted second.

Fortunately, there are many new models to show how this could work. In addition to our study of the app stores, our research on technology and literacy has led us to discover the emergence of dozens of new initiatives that employ technology in early literacy learning. These models (some of which are discussed on page 26) are springing up around the country in early learning centers, home-visiting and family support programs, libraries, and schools. They begin by recognizing that learning starts with the power of the adult-child relationship and *then* use technology to augment, assist, and provide support and guidance for those relationships.

Learning through Trial and Error

Across all of these human-powered, tech-assisted innovations, however, many challenges still exist. Several educators we've interviewed say they wish they had more time to try out new tools, critique apps and e-books, and adapt them to the needs of their particular classrooms. Others are trying to make sense of more "personalized" learning platforms that may help them vary instruction for their students. They are doing all this at the same time that they are expected to learn new standards, acclimate to new assessments, and do a better job of tuning into the special needs of children from a plethora of different backgrounds.

Ironically, then, making good on the promise of technology will mean changing routines to become truly *human centered*. It will require recognizing and adapting to the learning needs of the teachers, principals, and parents as much as those of the children.



Instead of pushing screens away, let's put them into the hands of adults and children to use *together* to learn and grow.

This past spring we witnessed what this might look like. At the Highlights Foundation's rural Pocono Mountains retreat in Pennsylvania, about half a dozen public school teachers and several librarians arrived for a small two-day forum with e-book and app developers and education researchers. The forum, part of a series of annual meetings titled "Dust or Magic," was designed by Warren Buckleitner, editor of the *Children's Technology Review*, who has lamented for years that these kinds of matchups are stunningly unusual. He clearly has hit on a winning combination. The educators were thrilled to talk to each other, reflect on their teaching strategies, and play with new tools. And the app developers were excited to hear from working educators.

A headliner for the conference was Kate Wilson, the managing director of Nosy Crow, a company based in the United Kingdom that creates story apps that get high marks from reviewers such as Buckleitner. Instead of simply showing the educators her company's story apps, which make creative use of public-domain fairy tales like "Goldilocks" and "Jack and the Beanstalk," Wilson gave them a behind-the-scenes look at how the apps are made and what decisions drive their design. Then she asked for their feedback: "Does this work?" she asked.

"I teach a unit with fairy tales, and we teach new versions all the time," piped up Denise Panza, who teaches first-graders at Stourbridge Primary Center in Honesdale, Pennsylvania. "To be able to have this to show different versions—what a cool tool."

Wilson probed further. In the Goldilocks app, readers can experience the story in two different ways, simultaneously. Click on Goldilocks, and you experience the story from her point of view; click on the bears, and you see theirs. The story is set up so that readers can also toggle back and forth at any time, moving from the bears' scene to Goldilocks's, and vice versa. During one of these scenes, children can also click on the bears as they are eating porridge at their breakfast table, which activates a conversation among all three bears.

Wilson wanted to know what the educators thought about the way the scene was set up. All this clicking for conversation: Was it too much? Or does it help?

Marci Jones, another teacher at Stourbridge Primary Center, gave the feature a thumbs up. "Having the characters speak to each other—some of our kids aren't getting that kind of discussion

at the dinner table. That's what I like about this," she said.

Back in Virginia, Nosy Crow apps are getting a thumbs up from Carla Bell too. She said her KinderPrep children are just as click-happy with Nosy Crow apps as they are when reading the "Critter" books. But in the case of the Nosy Crow apps, "having the characters talk" was both captivating and helpful in getting the children to follow the story.

Regardless of the story app or e-book, however, Bell said she is learning what works through trial and error. For one, she has realized that educators need to understand they can't just hand the kids the iPads. "I tell my teachers, 'You'll need to take this home first and play around with it.'" She also has come to recognize that while the apps can serve as what she calls a "teacher surrogate" when the teacher herself cannot be paying attention to every move, the presence of teachers and adults makes a big difference. "They got more out of it because I was there and could answer their questions," she said.

For too long, the debate about technology in early childhood has focused on "screen time," with an emphasis on how much time children are spending on screens instead of an emphasis on what they are actually doing with them. But now, with new efforts to explore the content on the screen and the context around it, educators and parents

(Continued on page 44)

“Teach Me How to Work and Keep Me Kind”

A Meditation on Literature in High School

BY JOSEPH F. RIENER

For 17 years, I taught AP English at a large public high school in Washington, D.C. Many students saw my job as helping them acquire the knowledge and skills to succeed in college. I viewed it as an opportunity to prepare young people for adulthood by offering them a memorable encounter with literature.

With poems, short stories, novels, and plays, I exposed students to a variety of ideas, issues, and feelings. I wanted them to ponder the complexity of human emotion and what constitutes a good life. The work my students undertook in my classroom, the important conversations they had with me and with each other, illustrates the possibilities and benefits of a liberal arts education.

Each year, I began my class for juniors with a poem by Robert Frost, “The Death of the Hired Man.” Because it combines a seemingly accessible dialogue without an initially clear sense of meaning, I could demonstrate the value of literary analysis as a way to derive a deeper understanding of the poem.

I would ask three students to read the poem aloud; each assumed a different character’s voice: that of the farmer, Warren; his wife, Mary; and the narrator. That way, students experienced something like a short play, where all the action occurs in the dialogue.

In the poem’s fifth line, Mary announces, “Silas is back.” Warren responds, “I’ll not have the fellow back.” The dynamic of the conversation establishes itself: Mary is sympathetic to this broken-down farm worker. Warren, the employer left in the lurch “in having time, when any help is scarce,” is angry at him.

Yet Mary persists. She wants Warren to open his heart to this

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old man. Recalling the summer that Silas worked with a college student, Mary has Warren imagine the comedic conversations of these two workers, the young one full of education, his elder convinced of its uselessness. We see Warren move from anger to appreciation as he recalls Silas’s ability to work efficiently in bailing hay. Mary then offers why Silas moves her: “He’s come home to die.” But Warren balks at her use of “home.” This isn’t Silas’s home, he implies, because “home is the place where, when you go there, they have to take you in.”

Mary counters, “I should have called it something you somehow haven’t to deserve,” thereby subverting Warren’s definition of a home based on obligation. She instead offers an idea of home

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATTHEW BAEK

as a place beyond deserving and founded on generosity. The extent of her ability to shift Warren's view of Silas becomes clear as he reflects, "I can't think Si ever hurt anyone." The poem concludes with Warren going to check on Silas and finding that the old man has died.

Now, what can this poem offer a high school class? It illustrates how emotions change and how anger doesn't always prevail. I used this poem to illustrate the Tao statement, "The softest of all things shall overcome the hardest of all things." Without fighting her husband directly, Mary succeeds in encouraging Warren to view Silas with more compassion. The old man emerges as far more than an irresponsible employee. Mary invites Warren to see him as someone "so concerned for other folk, and nothing to look backward to with pride, and nothing to look forward to with hope."

Through the poem, students witness the subtle art of persuasion. While Silas might be deemed homeless in our current nomenclature, Warren views him differently by the poem's end. This shift suggests the possibilities of personal transformation. In literature, as in life, compassion and understanding can replace anger and contempt.

It takes much discussion for students to grasp the poem. During this process, I saw myself as a tour guide. I accompanied young people as they took in the literature for the first time. I would offer them a way of understanding what they were reading. I would supply an idea to those who didn't yet possess the analytical tools, the frame of reference, or even the language of feeling necessary to articulate what they experienced as they heard the poem.

I saw my task as making connections that could slowly initiate a new method of seeing, a deeper way of reading. Only a teacher, an adult with a much larger vocabulary of emotion, can show students how an impression or a sensation may translate into an understanding of human experience.

Ultimately, I believe literature only means something if it prompts us to talk about ourselves. So I would always share a personal story. I would tell them that some time ago, on my second date with a young woman, I offered that she reminded me of Mary from "The Death of the Hired Man." She went home that night and read the poem. Now we have three children and three grandchildren. "You want enduring romance in your life?" I would ask my class. "Poetry! That's the way."

Though my wife and I lost track of the poem as our lives went on, when it came time to name our third child, I suggested "Silas." The name had always appealed to me. Only years later did I pick up the poem again to realize that's where I had first heard the name. Among the many lessons from Frost's poem that I would offer to my students is this: you never can tell how a work of literature might weave its way through your life, even without your conscious awareness.

Ushering Young People into an Uncertain World

As each school year progressed, my students and I would develop a greater sense of trust and connection. The stronger relationship



enabled us to discuss literary works that often evoke tender, even painful feelings.

For instance, "Father and Son," a poem by Stanley Kunitz, addresses his yearning for his father, who took his own life before Kunitz was born. In this poem, the poet offers a dream-like image of chasing after his absent father to bring him back to life and to a relationship with his son. Kunitz then asks his father to "teach me how to work and keep me kind."

We often believe young people wish to strike out on their own. But from the discussions my students and I had about this poem and the essays they wrote afterward, I know the poem evokes their own longing for adults in their lives who engage with them about how to relate to a terribly fraught world. They wish for someone to guide them as they struggle to make sense of the difficulties and confusions inherent in adult life.

Young people need our help in figuring out what work is worth their energy and devotion, and how whatever talents and inclinations they possess will connect with a lifetime of useful labor. As they become aware of cruelty and injustice in the world, they wonder how to respond to it without becoming mean or cynical. Kunitz's poem allows for a consideration of such questions within a high school classroom.

A liberal arts education can teach young people the habits of mind to enable them to thoughtfully consider how they want to spend their lives. It can also establish the connection between one's self and others, what we call empathy. With insight and understanding, the liberal arts can teach students that education is a matter of the head and the heart, of work and kindness. Literature aids the journey to compassion.

As an English teacher, I understand I am escorting young people out of their childhoods. What better novel to represent the power of grief in a human being's life than J. D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye*?

Few students know what to make of the novel's protagonist, Holden Caulfield, at first. Most see him as just a spoiled jerk. To help them understand Caulfield, I would ask my students if Holden was smart. Most would agree he displays some reflective sense about the world. Issues of right or wrong, truth or phoniness, weigh on his mind, even if in a skewed fashion. Ultimately, he comes across as a thoughtful, somewhat self-aware young person.

So, I would ask my students why he was unable to make his way through high school. They would offer that he was mentally ill, depressed, or "didn't care." Attempting to broaden their perspective, I would suggest he wasn't ill or depressed. What happened to him was human, not pathological.

Consider the context in which Holden finds himself: a prep school where someone has stolen his coat. Upon being kicked out of the school, he seeks out the one teacher he seemed to feel some affection toward so he can say a proper goodbye. Yet this man ends up humiliating Holden by reading from his failed test. The other boys seem predatory or self-absorbed themselves. We learn later that, at another former prep school Holden had attended, a student had been so bullied that the boy ended up killing himself. Although it's an unsympathetic environment for any young person, the other boys do seem able to manage the demands of a high school curriculum. Holden, on the other hand, flunks out. What's going on? Why can't he cope with life? What weighs on his mind that might be unusual compared with his fellow students? Have certain life experiences set him apart?

As I asked these questions, at some point a student, often one who has painfully gained a sense of these emotions, would offer the death of Holden's brother Allie as a significant event in Holden's life. We then would begin to highlight the times he discusses Allie: from the novel's beginning, with his story of Allie's baseball mitt covered with poems by Emily Dickinson, to his talk with his younger sister, Phoebe. She asks him to "name one thing" he likes, and Holden replies, "I like Allie." Then at the end of the novel, as Holden feels he's falling apart, he prays to Allie for help crossing the street without disappearing.

I would suggest to students that Holden shows us the power of grief in a person's life. In his prep school world, no one seems to know or care about the burden he carries.

Through the novel, my students learned how losing a child becomes a crisis for both siblings and parents. The death of someone so young upsets the world's sense of balance. It can easily

It takes a teacher, a knowledgeable guide, to help students understand the universal truths of a literary work.

destroy a belief in a benevolent God or a promising future. Holden's entire family feels plagued with the guilt of survivors. Holden loved his brother. The loss destroys his normal teenage life. At the end of the story, he's writing to us from a mental hospital, where the doctors have given him a good prognosis.

The journey into pain, perhaps as they reflect on their own losses, upsets many students. Yet literature exists partly to usher the young into an uncertain world. And this particular novel enables young people to connect to a person their age struggling with grief.

I challenged my students by asserting that Holden falling apart is a good thing. His reaction to Allie's death indicates his genuine feelings for his brother, and it demonstrates why loving someone is an act of courage. It means taking the risk that agony awaits if the love ends.

This novel also allowed me to connect the artist with a specific moment in history. Salinger, seemingly deliberately, allows almost no historical markers in the novel. He seems to wish us to consider the time as merely "the modern present." Only the publication date, 1951, indicates its moment in history. If there were a collective emotion the world experienced at that time, it was grief. Many people had died suddenly, horribly, in the previous few years. Loss of loved ones then would have been central to human consciousness. That may or may not have been in Salinger's consciousness as he wrote how grief pervaded the life of one young man. But as readers, we can understand that emotion in the immediate postwar world.

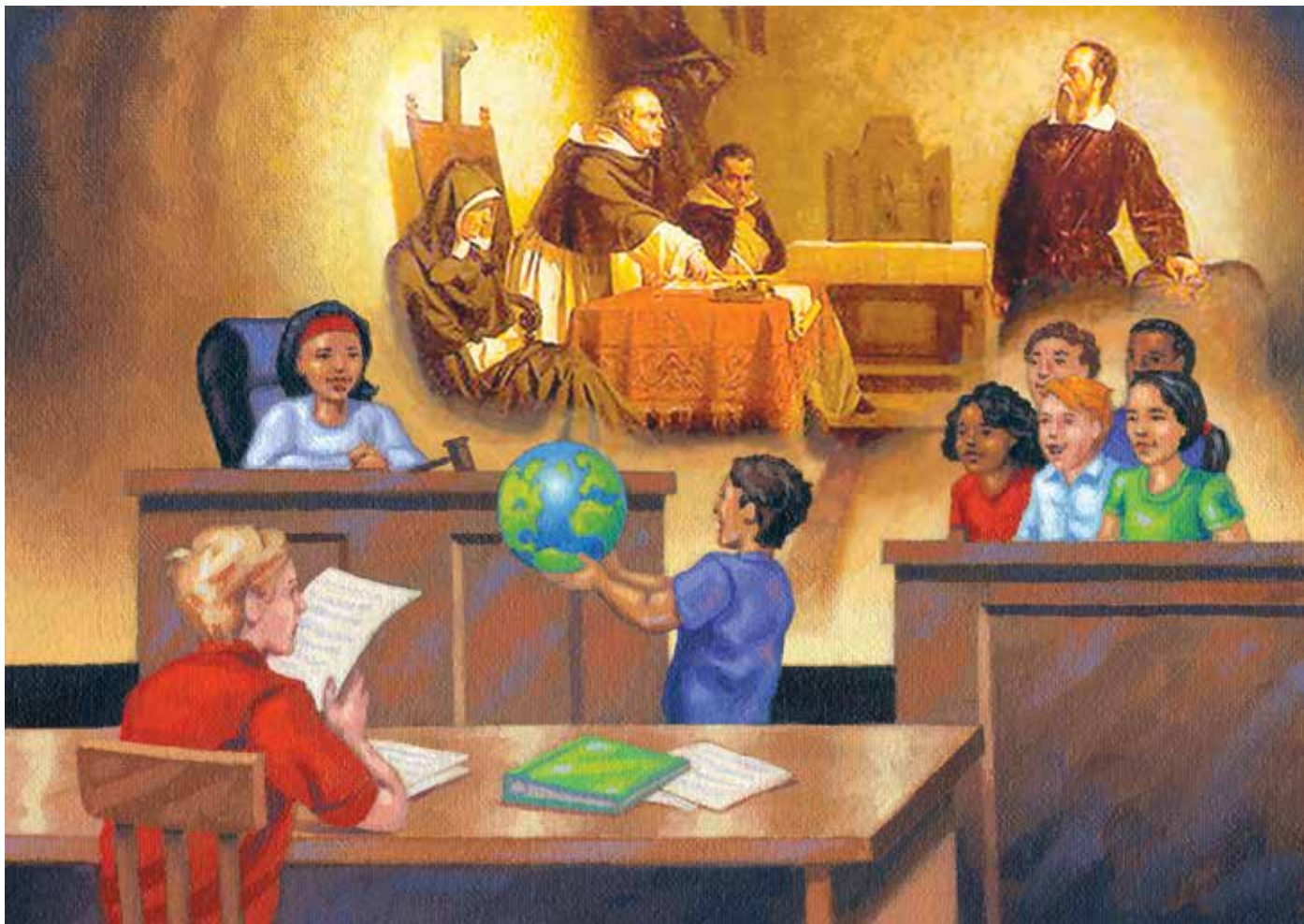
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Teach Me How to Work and Keep Me Kind and *Puzzle Me the Right Answer to That One*, by Joseph F. Riener, are published by Rowman & Littlefield, which is pleased to offer *American Educator* readers a 30 percent discount off their purchase through June 2017. To order, visit www.rowman.com or call 800-462-6420 and use discount code RLFANDF30.



A Day in Court

How Mock Trials Bring Learning to Life



BY DAVID SHERRIN

We are at a courthouse in Brooklyn for a mock Rwandan genocide trial of Athanase Seromba, a Catholic priest who allegedly participated in Hutu massacres of the Tutsi. A student playing a defense attorney strides to the podium to question the witness for the prosecution. They are both confident and prepared.

"Isn't it true," she begins, "that you said you never saw Seromba at his house while the meeting was taking place?" The witness pauses. "Incorrect, he was there." She shuffles through papers, looking for the evidence. "That's not what you said in your affida-

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vit," she retorts. The silence of the crowd transforms into oohs and claps, as if it were a sporting event. "You never saw Seromba with a gun, right?" she continues. "You never saw Seromba killing anyone?" The witness has no place to go. "No, I did not," he replies. "No further questions," the lawyer finishes, as she turns away.

Experiences like this one in the courtroom are some of the moments that I most look forward to during the school year, and these are the times I know I've truly witnessed my students' learning. Role-plays infuse much of my teaching and are at the heart of what I value and do in the classroom.

My passion for mock trials runs deep. In my book *Judging for Themselves: Using Mock Trials to Bring Social Studies and English to Life*, from which this article is drawn, I discuss their effectiveness as tools for learning and assessments. As a mock trial day approaches, I teach in top gear, filled with adrenaline and excitement, more than at any other point in the year. The reasons are multiple: students are performing and their knowledge is public; the outcome depends entirely on their work, but it is based on my effective preparation and scaffolding; students are taking on

roles of historical or literary characters; outside partners, friends, and family are involved; and the students are engaging in some of the most challenging and multifaceted intellectual work that we can provide.

I first began using mock trials a decade ago as a first-year teacher, when I created an early ancestor of my current Galileo and Martin Luther trials. After looking at primary sources together, I divided students into roles of various historical figures ranging from Pope Urban to Copernicus, and I watched gleefully as prosecuting lawyers pinned down witnesses under withering cross-examination.

Over the years, my mock trial repertoire and strategies developed far beyond that first attempt. I began emphasizing historical authenticity and the use of actual trial testimonies in my genocide tribunal trials for the Holocaust and Rwanda. As my teaching started to include a humanities and English component, I created a mock trial for the famous case in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and also for imaginary literary trials, such as one based on the actions of characters in *The Pearl*. My mock trials have always been criminal trials, though my colleagues have shown me the value of civil ones as well.

Why We Should Do Mock Trials

Here is why I do mock trials: they are challenging, authentic projects in which students create and then do something “real.” The projects serve as both learning and assessment tools since students learn from doing the work and teachers have a tangible product for evaluating understanding and growth. Mock trials are engaging for students, and the role-playing aspect gets them out of their chairs, collaborating, and entering into the mindsets and perspectives of their characters.

Equally important, the preparation for the trials becomes what one of my colleagues called “one of the most rigorous projects I have ever seen students do.” Why is that? First, the type of work is hard enough that law students take at least three years to master the art of legal questioning. More specifically, mock trials require students to read texts even more closely than normal in order to break them down, manipulate them, look for what *is and isn't* there, and then try to understand and use them to serve the goals of a particular character.

A mock trial is not just about getting students to answer questions. It is about having them figure out the answers to questions that you haven't asked and then getting them to write the questions for someone else to give those answers. It is about seeing evidence that is there but also about widening tiny gaps of what isn't there into gaping holes that, perhaps, make a case burst open.

Mock trials are like role-plays with documents. Students recognize the challenging nature of the work. Students need to see a text through the lens of their claims and perspectives. Bias and credibility are crucial concepts not only in the historian's work but perhaps even more so in the eyes of a lawyer. In short, mock trials incorporate all of what great social studies teachers look for—claim, counterclaim, selection of evidence, use of evidence, perspective, and sourcing/bias—and put it into a tantalizing package.

A strong mock trial cultivates student engagement that leads to high-quality work. One of my quietest students wrote: “The mock trial was like an experience of it actually happening. I think

going into a courtroom* and role-playing it is really fun because we don't just read and write—we act. My favorite part out of the whole class was the courtroom. It helps us learn in a living experience way.”

Before the day in court, mock trials are about intellectual preparation. Students are engaged in the heavy-duty work of lawyers—reading carefully, crafting questions, thinking about holes in arguments, experimenting, and piecing together a case. When trial day comes around, they've finished the intellectual lifting and now need to put it in practice, in public, for all to see. It is a performance of their learning in the truest sense.

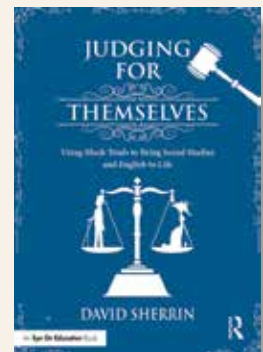
The rigorous nature of this strategy does not mean it is only for the elite. I have incorporated mock trials with diverse groups of students. I began them at the Facing History School, a public high

Role-plays infuse much of my teaching and are at the heart of what I value and do in the classroom.

school in New York City that serves a high-needs population of students. I taught mainly ninth grade and developed mock trials to support students who were behind grade level. My current school, Harvest Collegiate High School, serves a wider spectrum of the New York City population, and the inherent differentiation within mock trial roles allows me to challenge the highest performers and to meet struggling students at their level.

*The classroom or an auditorium is always a venue option for a trial. But I try to plan ahead and secure a courtroom. It is necessary, of course, to obtain permission from officials at the courts beforehand, but I have found local courthouses eager to open their doors for student mock trials.

Judging for Themselves: Using Mock Trials to Bring Social Studies and English to Life, by David Sherrin, is published by Routledge, which is offering a 20 percent discount off the purchase of the book through February 2017. To order, visit www.routledge.com and use discount code JFT20 (cannot be combined with any other offer).



Creating a Mock Trial

The term “mock trial” can take on various meanings. Most often, in schools, we use it to refer to a mock trial club in which students learn the intricacies of legal proceedings, including areas like the introduction of evidence and objections, in order to take on a fictitious criminal or civil case and compete against other schools.

My strategy, which is meant to be used in the classroom, attempts to use the core of the legal format (witnesses, evidence, opening and closing statements, and direct and cross-examination questions) in order to build a realistic experience for students that develops important academic skills. For the most part, I am not concerned with the minutiae of trial rules unless they contribute to a key skill and comprehension of content and themes in social studies and English.*

Preparing a successful mock trial can be daunting, so I’ve broken down the necessary steps: choosing and teaching a story, selecting a defendant, choosing the witnesses, creating the affidavits and exhibits, and assigning the students.



Choosing and Teaching a Story

Each of the two to three trials I hold during the school year reflects a central moment in a much larger chapter in human history, whether it’s the Protestant Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, or the Holocaust. Given the demands of preparing and executing a mock trial, it makes more sense if the project fits into the larger content goals of your course. For example, only do a trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg if you’re spending time looking at American reactions to the Cold War.

For the trial to have meaning, it needs to come after learning about the larger event and the larger context of history. Before our Nuremberg trial, my students spend weeks learning about the causes of the Holocaust, Nazi policies, and the concentration camps. We study Martin Luther and Galileo before our cases on them, not only because it provides meaning for them, but also

*Many people ask me the extent to which I delve into legal technicalities such as objections and introducing exhibits during these trials. I focus only on the core legal strategies for opening statements, closing statements, and questioning, which lead to rigorous thinking about claims, counterclaims, evidence, and sources.

because they cannot try these cases in “court” without that base comprehension. Since we are using primary sources set in those times and places, there is too much complex vocabulary—e.g., “indulgences” or the “Copernican system”—that can trip students up unless they already understand it.

One common question about mock trials is whether to do a trial that actually happened or an imaginary one. I fall firmly in the former camp, although it is a bit more from a gut reaction than anything else. My sense is that since there is so much “history” out there for students to learn that *did* happen, it doesn’t make much sense to spend time and effort engaging with something that *didn’t*. By focusing on a trial that did happen, we can then also have discussions about its real implications and consequences, and the perceptions around it. My goal is to make any role-play, even a trial, as authentic as possible, and that can happen only through using actual witnesses and sources.

Selecting a Defendant

To avoid having a trial end up too one-sided, I make sure to have a defendant who brings out moral complexities, who could be reasonably found either guilty or not guilty, and whose case matter is accessible to students. For instance, I considered a few possibilities in planning a Nuremberg trial. First, I looked for a doctor we could put on trial, perhaps one who had done experiments on Jews and abused his authority as a physician, but I could not locate enough primary source material to put together a great trial with authentic evidence. And I knew, of course, that if I put someone like Adolf Eichmann, Rudolf Hoess, or Hermann Goering on the stand, the defense would have a nearly impossible task. (Interestingly, the same year, there was a major mock trial of Goering at the National Model United Nations conference, which I thought was a mistake given his obvious culpability.)

So I began to consider three different witnesses who were defendants in the principal Nuremberg trial: Walter Funk, Albert Speer, and Julius Streicher. Funk and Speer were industrialists and economists, which raised an interesting moral dilemma about responsibility. Were those who financed the war, the army, and the camps responsible for the genocide? Streicher, meanwhile, was a propagandist who used his newspaper, *Der Stürmer*, as a launching pad to incite hatred of Jews.

To choose between these three defendants, I dove into the testimony of their cases to get a sense of what type of evidence would be available for the students to read. Using Yale University’s Avalon Project website,[†] which has translations of the original court transcripts, I pored over the transcripts of the trials to begin to separate out the statements of possible witnesses. I gathered evidence for about 15 witnesses for the Streicher case and about 13 possible witnesses for the Funk case. When I began to look deeper into Speer’s case, I realized that the economic nature of his work was just not as comprehensible. I couldn’t seem to glue together coherent statements that would make sense to my students. So, I threw him out of the running.

At that point, I realized that I had a similar issue with Funk’s testimony. Yes, there was enough of it, but the content was so highly economic and technical that my students would have an

[†]For the Avalon Project, visit http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/mt.asp.

extra layer of difficulty to wade through without a strong economic vocabulary. There are enough other tough things for them to do in this project, and it probably wouldn't be as interesting for them.

In the case of Streicher, on the other hand, the evidence was available and the theme, propaganda, was both accessible and highly interesting to my students. The testimonies were at a reachable level, and his case raised thought-provoking issues about culpability. By the time the concentration camps were underway, the Nazi Party had mostly exiled Streicher and he was living on a farm. He took part in no major decisions involving the Holocaust, except possibly on Kristallnacht, and he was not involved in the organization or running of the camps or the firing squads. For him, then, the main question is whether the words and images that appeared in *Der Stürmer* served as a direct cause of the genocide. What is the power of our words? He became the right defendant.

Choosing the Witnesses

Choosing the witnesses can make or break the success of a case. My first rule of "witness selection" is to attempt to be as authentic as possible. Who was actually involved in the trial? When I first began my trials of Galileo and Luther, I stretched too wide and far in selecting witnesses. I chose people like Johannes Kepler and Erasmus who were involved in the wider discussions about Galileo and Luther but who played no role in their actual trials. I liked using them because they could discuss pieces of key evidence, like a letter that Galileo wrote to Kepler. But the students didn't learn how these particular trials and inquisitions that lacked witnesses really worked.

In leaning toward greater authenticity over the years, I initially would whittle the witnesses down to people who were directly involved in those cases, like the pope or Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, although they were not actual witnesses at the trials. Only more recently, however, did I realize that even this narrow scope was not restricted enough. These were not American trials with outside witnesses; they were inquisition cases with only one witness: the defendant. The attempt to hold an inquisition trial using the American criminal justice format was hindering student understanding of the event and the idea of justice. I realized that the only witnesses to use were the only two actual witnesses: the defendants, Luther and Galileo. Everything needed to be about how they saw and responded to their own key statements and writings and those of authorities of the Church.

A literature trial like the one in *To Kill a Mockingbird* does the work for us. The obvious witnesses to use are the ones that the author created for the trial—Tom Robinson, Mayella Ewell, Bob Ewell (Mayella's father), and Sheriff Heck Tate.

A greater challenge is in putting together a full trial in the format of the American criminal justice system or an international genocide tribunal, whether we are talking about the trials of the killers of Emmett Till, the Rosenbergs, or Julius Streicher. Here, the first step is to understand who the witnesses actually were in the cases. In the Streicher case, for example, that meant first reading through court records and testimonies on the Avalon website. Some options were obvious: the people who were actually called to the stand, like Streicher

himself; his wife, Adele Streicher; Friedrich Strobel (a government official); and Fritz Herrwerth (his driver).

Needing more prosecution witnesses, I began to include people who spoke of Streicher in other texts, such as Viktor Lutze, chief of the Nazi Sturmabteilung. I made one of Streicher's illustrators into another witness. Each was there to comment on articles and drawings in *Der Stürmer*. Students had to try to understand the sources from these characters' perspectives and what they said about Streicher.

Now, however, I stick even closer to the actual process. At Nuremberg, the prosecution made its case not by calling its own witnesses but instead by submitting the astounding number of self-incriminating documents that the Nazis had created. In this project, the only witnesses are defense witnesses, the actual ones who were called to the witness stand, and the prosecution must make its case through cross-examination and use of exhibits.

Why not immerse our students in a learning activity that brings up wellsprings of emotion and excitement?

Creating the Affidavits and Exhibits

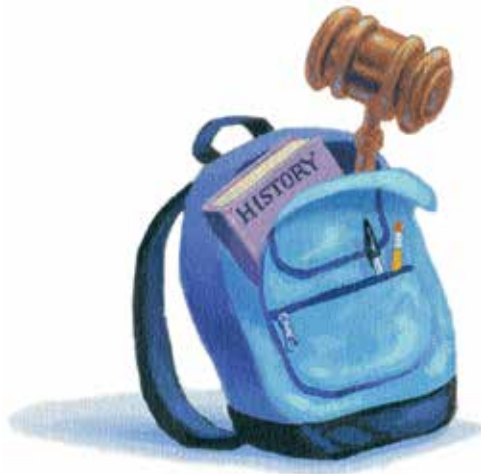
One reason I love these trials is that students spend so much time dissecting one or two sources. Normally, we read something and move on. With trials, the evidence sheets that I create for them, which include affidavits and exhibits, may appear too hard at first glance. They probably are. Students often don't understand their evidence sheets right away. This is the beauty of spending four days prepping for the trial, during which each student focuses on the same one to three pages of text. First, they struggle to understand it. Then, they strive to pull out ideas and evidence. Finally, they connect the dots, piece together a case, and write questions that support their positions.

My main rule for evidence sheets is to be authentic. If there is testimony from the trial, teachers can adapt it into an affidavit. If the trial refers to the defendant's writings or other texts, teachers can use them as exhibits. You may create general exhibits that all lawyers and witnesses have access to or ones that are specific to certain witnesses and included alongside their affidavits.

To clarify, affidavits refer to sworn testimony taken before a trial. In my mock trials, I use "affidavit" to refer to an evidence sheet that includes the actual words of a particular witness, which I normally excerpt and adapt from real court testimony. Exhibits

refer to additional documents or primary sources directly related to the case. For example, my evidence sheets for Adele Streicher include her adapted testimony as an affidavit (part of which is shown in Table 1 on page 37) and one of her husband's articles as an exhibit. The students playing the lawyers (whether prosecution or defense) questioning Adele may use any of these documents to compose their questions. The student playing her as a witness also has access to them to prepare.

I always “shop” first in the court record, whether I’m looking for the transcripts or a final judgment. In the Nuremberg case of Julius Streicher, I used the Avalon website, which provides the trial transcript. With it, I composed affidavits for all of the defense witnesses. As you can see from Adele’s testimony, though, there are a few difficulties in using it. First, the text included the questions of the lawyer, Dr. Marx. I want students creating the questions, so I needed to get rid of them in the adapted version. When I did so, however, the text no longer made perfect sense because her statements were in the form of answers to questions that were no longer there. As a fix, I made minimal adaptations, in order to maintain the integrity of the original.



I also need to take into account that lawyers enter exhibits into evidence, which doesn’t always come out in the transcript. At Nuremberg, the prosecution made its case against Streicher with copious examples of his speeches and articles from *Der Stürmer*. The students can’t grasp the case or make cogent arguments without access to excerpts from the newspaper or his speeches. To provide them access, I used professor Randall Bytwerk’s invaluable website* of Nazi propaganda. I excerpted the texts for length and matched up each one with an affidavit on a related topic. For example, one defense witness in his affidavit argues that Streicher never advocated violence against Jews. Hence, that witness’s evidence sheet includes that statement, plus an exhibit with one of Streicher’s speeches in which he proposes extermination. This allows the prosecuting lawyer, doing cross-examination, to attack the claim from the affidavit by comparing it with the exhibit.

The key move, for me, is to identify a main topic or theme for each witness and then to ensure that the witness’s evidence sheet includes two texts: one that (mostly) supports the defense and

one that (mostly) supports the prosecution. Having contradictory texts side by side opens up a wealth of options for the lawyers on both sides to dig deeply in their questioning.

Every trial requires similar adaptations to provide what the students need in a manageable space.

Assigning the Students

One compelling aspect of mock trials is that they inherently differentiate for widely diverse skill levels. We can thoughtfully assign different roles and texts to challenge each student at just the right level.

I tend to have different lawyers for each witness, and I assign them based on the difficulty of each task or role. The hardest job, which I give my strongest students, is cross-examination, because they are not necessarily writing questions based on the evidence sheets. Instead, they must find holes, problems, biases, and contradictions.

The witnesses and the lawyers doing direct examination can work together on the questions. My “middle” learners become witnesses, and they can help create their own questions that they will answer on the stand. Being a witness requires the ability to think on one’s feet and to process information quickly. My struggling students take on the role of lawyers doing direct examination, whether for the defense or the prosecution. Direct examination is easier, and they have the support of the witnesses.

This system for mock trials has increased collaboration, provided opportunities for all, and targeted the needs of each student. It is authentic differentiation.

The courtroom is often the setting for compelling drama in popular American literature and film, whether the behind-the-scenes dealings of *Twelve Angry Men*, the suspense of John Grisham’s *The Firm*, or the sleazy dealings of *The Lincoln Lawyer*. While we know that the real-life dealings of most lawyers are far more tedious, the exaggerated tensions in those stories reflect a true drama at the heart of the law: the pursuit of justice.

Two personal stories, among many, stick out in my mind about the power of the courtroom. The first is about how one of my friends became an attorney. She had been “unfortunate” enough to be chosen for a jury and was, at first, reluctant to serve, but as she watched the case unfold before her, she became “taken” by what she saw. Soon after, she decided to enter law school, and she now works as a labor attorney.

The second story involves a class trip to a federal court in Manhattan, which one of my colleagues organized, to watch the sentencing of a man convicted as an accomplice to robbery. It was his first offense, and he had been threatened and coerced into joining the crime. He seemed genuinely repentant, and we had read his confession beforehand. Now we would learn the consequence. We sat there alongside the defendant’s family as the judge cleared his throat to announce the sentence. We realized that this man’s future was in the hands of this judge, whose view of justice would decide the defendant’s fate. There was a sigh of relief as the judge announced that the defendant would not be sent to prison but would instead pay back the stolen money and complete community service. The defendant’s mother then stood up to emotionally thank the judge.

*For Randall Bytwerk’s website, visit <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/www2era.htm>.

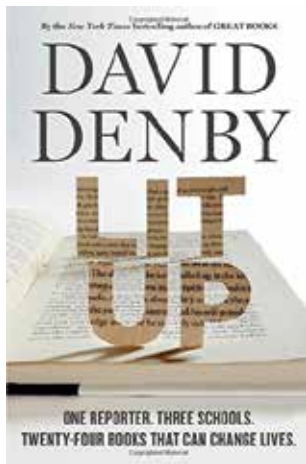
Mock trials, whether they are based on historical trials like that of Julius Streicher or literary ones such as Tom Robinson's in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, can be just as dramatic. Moreover, they can help students develop critical-thinking and communication skills and learn about events that help define our sense of justice. Why not immerse our students in a learning activity that brings up wellsprings of emotion and excitement?

And when we begin to delve into not only the intricacies of a particular case but also its implications for the concept of "justice," then we are engaging in a deep philosophical and ethical conversation that has its roots in Hammurabi, Deuteronomy, Confucius, and Aristotle. As a result, our students become part of that chain of thinkers who question what is right, what is just, and how we order a society in which we have some hope of achieving those lofty goals. □

Table 1: Adapting a Trial Transcript into a Witness Evidence Sheet

Original Transcript	Adapted Transcript
<p>Dr. Marx: When did you become Herr Streicher's secretary, and for how long were you in that job?</p> <p>Frau Streicher: On 7 June 1940, I became Julius Streicher's secretary, and I remained in that job until the end of the war.</p> <p>Dr. Marx: And during that period, you were continuously on his farm?</p> <p>Frau Streicher: Yes, I was always with him.</p> <p>Dr. Marx: Were you also in charge of all the correspondence for Herr Streicher?</p> <p>Frau Streicher: Yes.</p> <p>Dr. Marx: What did that correspondence mainly consist of?</p> <p>Frau Streicher: Mainly letters to his sons and to relatives.</p> <p>Dr. Marx: What were Streicher's activities during that period of five years?</p> <p>Frau Streicher: Julius Streicher did mainly physical work—that is, agriculture and gardening—and from time to time he wrote articles for <i>Der Stürmer</i>.</p> <p>Dr. Marx: During these five years, did he leave the farm at all or was he ever absent from the farm for any length of time?</p> <p>Frau Streicher: During the first few years of his stay there, Julius Streicher did not leave the farm at all; later, once in a while, he would pay a visit in the neighborhood. His longest absence did not comprise an entire day, and never a single night.</p> <p>Dr. Marx: Did you know that it was prohibited for prominent Party members to visit Herr Streicher?</p> <p>Frau Streicher: Yes, there was such a prohibition.</p> <p>Dr. Marx: How did you know that?</p> <p>Frau Streicher: From conversations. Then, too, I myself remember, when Dr. Goebbels visited the farm, that Julius Streicher said to him, "Doctor, you dare to come here? Do you not know that it is prohibited by the Party chiefs to visit me?"</p> <p>Dr. Marx: When did the visits of Dr. Ley and Dr. Goebbels occur?</p> <p>Frau Streicher: Dr. Ley came to the farm on 7 May 1944. The visit of Dr. Goebbels occurred on 4 June 1944.</p>	<p>On 7 June 1940, I became Julius Streicher's secretary, and I remained in that job until the end of the war. I was always with him on the farm, and I was in charge of his correspondence, which was mainly letters to his sons and to relatives.</p> <p>During that time, Julius Streicher did mainly physical work—that is, agriculture and gardening—and from time to time he wrote articles for <i>Der Stürmer</i>.</p> <p>During the first few years of his stay there, Julius Streicher did not leave the farm at all; later, once in a while, he would pay a visit in the neighborhood. His longest absence did not comprise an entire day, and never a single night.</p> <p>When Dr. Goebbels visited the farm, Julius Streicher said to him, "Doctor, you dare to come here? Do you not know that it is prohibited by the Party chiefs to visit me?"</p> <p>Dr. Ley came to the farm on 7 May 1944. The visit of Dr. Goebbels occurred on 4 June 1944.</p>

LIT UP: ONE REPORTER. THREE SCHOOLS. TWENTY-FOUR BOOKS THAT CAN CHANGE LIVES



Despite myriad distractions, high school students can still be moved by literature. But they need dynamic teachers to show them why great books are worth their time. That's the conclusion David Denby draws in *Lit Up: One Reporter. Three Schools. Twenty-Four Books That Can Change Lives* (Henry Holt).

Denby, a journalist and longtime *New Yorker* writer, observed the classrooms of English teachers at three different high schools: the Beacon School in New York City, James Hillhouse High School in New Haven, Connecticut, and Mama-

roneck High School in Westchester County, New York. He devotes much of his book to the tenth-grade English class of “a dynamo named Sean Leon.” Leon teaches at Beacon, a public school that belongs to the New York Performance Standards Consortium,* which relies on performance-based assessments, such as essays, research papers, science experiments, and high-level mathematical problems, to engage students and meaningfully assess student learning.

In Leon’s class, Denby watches as he introduces students to

*For more about this consortium, see “Putting the Focus on Student Engagement” in the Spring 2016 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2016/barlowe-and-cook.

the works of William Faulkner, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Kurt Vonnegut, and Sylvia Plath, among others. In great detail, he describes how Leon shares his passion for literature with his students, prompts them to think deeply about what they’re reading, encourages the quiet ones to speak up in class, and focuses everyone’s comments on the text.

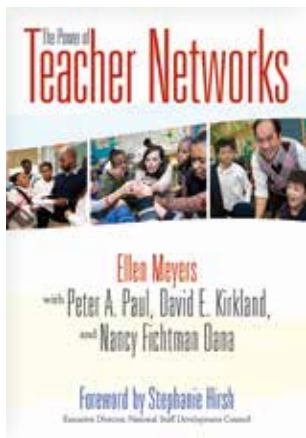
“In the end, he moved them to the ‘right’ interpretation, but he never simply laid down the law,” Denby writes. “If they were going to talk candidly in class, they needed to be free to make mistakes, to head off in strange directions.”

But “at a certain point subjectivity had to end,” and he would ask a student to read from the text. “The conversation was free, and sometimes loose-limbed, but it had to come back to literature.”

Denby’s book is an eloquent affirmation of literature’s power. People read for many reasons, he explains, including pleasure and knowledge, and an understanding of “how to live and die” in the world. Reading, he suggests, is not just for the elite but for everyone. And that’s where schools come in. “The first premise of American public education is that the door is wide open,” he writes. “The question always is how many will walk through or get pushed through. That entranceway is where teachers matter more than the rest of us.”

To that end, this book is also an affirmation of educators. At a time when critics of public education vilify unions and their members, Denby includes a refreshing “note on unions” in the book’s introduction. “I went looking for good public-school teachers,” he writes. “It was only after I found a few that I realized they were all members of teacher unions.”

THE POWER OF TEACHER NETWORKS



Some education books focus solely on theory, and educators might wonder how they relate to their classrooms and their professional lives. *The Power of Teacher Networks* (Corwin), by Ellen Meyers (with contributions from Peter A. Paul, David E. Kirkland, and Nancy Fichtman Dana), is different. The book explores what it refers to as teacher networks: groups of teachers who come together to support each other and find solutions to the problems they face. Meyers and her colleagues detail the example of the

Teachers Network (TN), which has pioneered this model of professional development for 35 years. Their book gives educators concrete ways they can form their own network, and explains why they might want to do so.

The key word in the book’s title is “power.” Often, the authors lament, teachers feel little control over educational policy, and even less over reforms to it. Moreover, the nature of their work can leave teachers isolated in their classrooms. The purpose of a network is to overcome these barriers. By meeting with colleagues regularly, supporting one another’s development, and

helping each other learn how to effect policy change, educators can harness much greater power than they could alone. And when educators feel empowered, they can act as members of a true profession, earn a seat at the policymaking table, and pursue the ideal of what the authors call “teacher-led reform.”

Most of the book tells the story of TN and its affiliated Teachers Network Leadership Institute conference. It describes how the network got off the ground and grew from a small gathering to a nationwide forum. Throughout, readers will learn how to run their own networks: from establishing an initial group, to expanding the group and running meetings, to connecting with allies. The book even features sample documents a nascent network might use.

At many points, the authors mention the problem of teacher turnover and educators who leave the profession altogether. TN’s founders set out explicitly to address this issue, as they reasoned the empowerment afforded by networks could keep teachers teaching and prevent burnout. Several educators’ testimonials peppered throughout the book attest to TN’s effectiveness and how their collaborative experiences reinforced their commitment to the classroom.

Meyers has played a principal role in the design and ongoing implementation of the AFT’s Teacher Leaders Program, now in its sixth year. This book serves as the primary curriculum guide for the program.

Reinforcing Positive Behavior



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WALK DOWN THE HALLWAY of any school, and you're likely to see all sorts of scenarios: students rushing to class, others taking their time; some learning in noisy classrooms, others learning in quiet ones. You might also note particular teachers who seem to have it all under control—ones whose students are working productively, cooperating with others, and treating their teacher and their classmates with respect. How do they do it?

The answer is: creating a positive classroom climate while balancing all the responsibilities of being an educator takes work. But finding this balance can have far-reaching effects, both inside and outside of school, so it's worth spending time on honing your approach.

Creating this kind of classroom environment centers around reinforcing positive behavior* and requires teachers to believe that all students, even the most challenging ones, can improve their behavior. To support teachers in the work of positive discipline, the AFT's own Share My Lesson offers resources (<http://go.aft.org/AE316sml1>) on how to avoid relying heavily on punitive consequences for bad behavior.

Reinforcing Language

Many times, when students begin to act up in class, teachers will use punitive language to discourage disruptive behavior. This type

of response seems logical but is hardly effective. The best approach for reinforcing positive behavior in the classroom is to focus on building students' strengths rather than focusing on their weaknesses. This approach helps students see a clear path forward rather than dwell on past mistakes.

Talking to students using reinforcing language is a shift for many teachers and can take some practice. The Responsive Classroom website has some ways to get started, available at www.bit.ly/2aXEdIL. These tips include naming concrete and specific behaviors in your feedback to students, focusing on what the student has done rather than stating how proud or disappointed you are with her performance, and finding positives to reinforce in all students.

Clarifying Expectations

Creating a positive classroom can only happen when all students understand the common code of conduct they are expected to follow. A great way to start is by asking students to participate in creating classroom rules. How do your students like to be treated? Asking your students this simple question can help them understand how important it is to treat others with respect and fairness. For more strategies, see "Seven Strategies for Building Positive Classrooms" at www.bit.ly/1gHoiok.

Once these expected behaviors have been discussed and a code of conduct has been created, it's important to model these behaviors. Help students remember that they need to walk quietly through school hallways, and show them how to work in groups and respect the opinions

of others. It might even be necessary to reteach students certain positive behaviors, like how to successfully transition into and out of group work without disrupting the class.

Remember to ask students to help create an action plan for how a violation of the classroom rules will be addressed. Transparency about potential consequences is crucial to ensuring your students—and you—are on the same page. Remember to implement these consequences calmly and consistently to help your class move on quickly from any code of conduct violations.

As educational consultant Randy Sprick suggests, keep the acronym CHAMPS in mind when creating a positive classroom culture. The acronym stands for conversation, help, activity, movement, participation, and success, and it's a great reminder that students need to be able to talk to each other, ask for help, and understand what is expected of them. For more on CHAMPS, visit the Safe & Civil Schools website at www.bit.ly/2bCl1za.

Seeing Positive Results

By evaluating your use of language in the classroom and taking the time to work with students to create classroom rules and expectations, your classroom climate can become more positive. Allowing students to play a significant role in deciding what their classroom culture should look like will help them understand why they need to respect their peers and their teacher, not to mention themselves and their own learning.

—THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM

*For more about creating a positive school climate, see "It's About Relationships: Creating Positive School Climates" in the Winter 2015–2016 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/ashley.

The AFT's New Professional Development Online

HAVE YOU HEARD about the AFT's new *free* member benefit, Professional Development Online (<http://elearning.aft.org>)? This online platform is a powerful tool to engage, inform, and connect members. It offers both self-paced and facilitated courses, collaborative learning communities, an interactive webinar platform to

conduct trainings, access to news and blogs, and more.

The courses provided through this website are fully portable, meaning you can learn when and where it's convenient for you, based on your schedule. They are research based and align with the Common Core State Standards; even better, they are easily customizable to meet local and state standards.

Through this web-based platform, educators can access content to learn new techniques and get tips for creating classroom environments that foster success for all students. The site creates a space where educators can talk to colleagues from around the country and get support and information.

Here are some additional ways to take advantage of the site:

Create Personalized Pages for Your Local. Local AFT affiliates can create a course for their own members or create a community specifically tailored to them. The site also includes a survey tool and a webinar tool, which users can access for free.

Join a Community. Want to connect with colleagues across

the country, learn what is going on in your field, or connect to other resources? This site has a community page for early childhood education, healthcare, higher education, K-12 education, paraprofessionals and school-related personnel, public employees, and retirees. There is also a community just for AFT union leaders to connect with each other. On the community pages, you will find discussion forums, news items, blog posts, and links to other resources.

Find Resources. Go to the webinar section to watch archived presentations, or use the platform to create a webinar of your own. Browse the resource library, where content is organized by topic, including discipline, assessments, bullying prevention, and community schools. Find out about upcoming professional learning events on the national calendar of events. Check out recent news articles, and read member-written blog posts (or submit one of your own).

Use this new platform to see how your voice matters and to join or start an effort to help your colleagues, your profession, and your community. For more information, watch an introductory video at www.tinyurl.com/aboutPDO or email elearning@aft.org.

—AFT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT



RESOURCES

SHADOW A STUDENT CHALLENGE

Nearly 1,500 school leaders cleared their calendars last spring and immersed themselves in the lives of students through the Shadow a Student Challenge. The idea, which grew from a partnership that included the Institute of Design at Stanford University, drew principals, school leaders, and other educators from all 50 states and 31 countries, all of whom were eager to enrich their professional knowledge by walking in students' shoes. The reflections and resources that sprang from the challenge are now available at www.shadowastudent.org.

SHOWCASING HUMAN RIGHTS

Teaching human rights can help make the world a more just place, and the AFT is supporting that essential classroom work with new online resources: "Replacing Fear with Facts: Teaching Islam in the Classroom" and "Youth Impact: Your Future. Your Voice." Geared toward grades 6-10, these lessons are Common Core friendly and include activities, songs, and short videos. They join the growing number of lessons on the AFT's Teach Human Rights website, dealing with topics such as sweatshops, human trafficking, and genocide. Find them at www.teachhumanrights.com.

FARM-TO-SCHOOL SUPPORT

Recent surveys show that food security is among AFT members' top concerns for their students, and the National Farm to School Network can help. The network offers information, advocacy, and a hub for communities working to bring local food sourcing and nutrition education into schools. For an extensive, searchable database of resources, tips on getting a program started, a monthly newsletter, and much more, visit www.farmtoschool.org.

APPS TO INSPIRE

PBS affiliate KQED recently reached out to tech-savvy librarians who have been curating and sharing standout smartphone apps. The result of this work is featured in "Librarian Approved: 30 Ed-Tech Apps to Inspire Creativity and Creation," an article that explains why these apps are the "go-to" choices for librarians. Read the article at www.bit.ly/28SvUu0.

UNDERSTANDING SACRIFICE

A team of 18 teachers has launched an award-winning collection of classroom activities on World War II called "Understanding Sacrifice." The project's lessons on the war are for grades 6 and up. Details and lessons are available at www.abmceducation.org.

“A PARTNER IN THE WHITE HOUSE”

Speaking at the AFT’s biennial convention at the Minneapolis Convention Center this summer, Hillary Clinton drew big cheers and rounds of applause when she detailed a vision for public schools and the public sector that focused on well-resourced institutions, effective community connections, and solid school strategies forged in partnership with educators and public employees. “I want to thank you for being one of the essential partners for everything we need to do to move the country in the right direction,” the Democratic presidential nominee told the more than 3,000 educators, healthcare workers, public sector employees, and guests who filled the convention hall for her address. “When I’m president, you will have a partner in the White House, and you will always have a seat at the table,” she said. Later, delegates voted resoundingly to endorse Clinton in the general election. Details are available at <http://go.aft.org/AE316news2>.



MICHAEL CAMPBELL

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STATE-FUNDED PREKINDERGARTEN IN MINNESOTA

Minnesota is launching a first-ever round of state-funded preschool. AFT affiliates are among the many groups calling the expansion a necessary start that demands aggressive follow-through by the state legislature so that more kids can benefit. A total of 74 districts will share in the \$25 million preschool appropriation, Governor Mark Dayton announced in August. The funding will allow 3,300 children to enroll in free, voluntary prekindergarten. However, Dayton was adamant that the program must grow—applications from more than 100 districts were turned down due to lack of money. “The fact that more than half could not be funded, to me, is the impetus for why the program needs to be expanded,” Dayton told reporters. Read more at <http://go.aft.org/AE316news3>.

NEW JERSEY’S NEW PARCC MANDATE

The New Jersey Board of Education voted in August to make the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exams mandatory for high school graduation, starting with the class of 2021. The action means that this year’s eighth-graders must pass PARCC language arts and Algebra I tests, in addition to a minimum list of required credits, to receive their diplomas. Prior to the vote, hundreds of parents, teachers, and groups aligned with the testing “opt-out” movement submitted comments opposing the move. Read more at Diane Ravitch’s blog: www.bit.ly/2bBCYw6.

AFT’S 2016 RESOLUTIONS NOW ONLINE

Fulfilling the promise of the Every Student Succeeds Act, securing the professional rights and status of AFT members, and working to elect Democrat Hillary Clinton as the next president were just some of the major resolutions and policy statements adopted by delegates to the AFT’s convention, July 18–21 in Minneapolis. The 2016 policy statements, along with prior convention resolutions, are available at www.aft.org/about/resolutions.

COURT BACKS PHILADELPHIA CONTRACT RIGHTS

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled in August that the Philadelphia School Reform Commission (SRC) has no authority to cancel the collective bargaining agreement with teachers in the city or change the contract’s terms and conditions of employment. The court’s unanimous decision upholds a lower court decision and is “a total and complete repudiation” of the SRC’s efforts to undercut contract protections for Philadelphia teachers, says Philadelphia Federation of Teachers President Jerry Jordan, who is also an AFT vice president. Additional coverage is available at www.bit.ly/2bBBpHu.

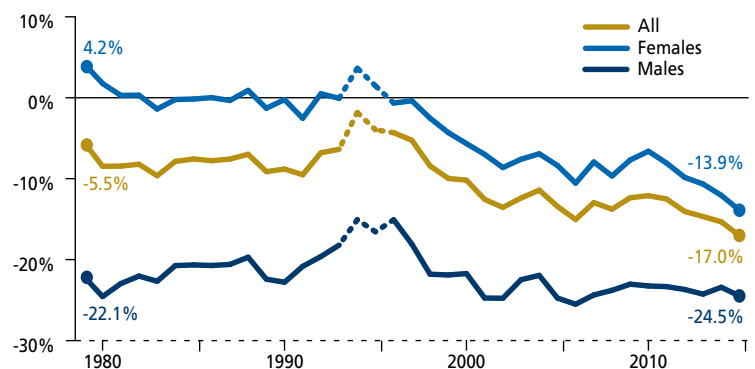
STATES, GROUPS PRESS TO REWORK ESSA REGULATIONS

The AFT, along with several states and education groups, is calling on federal officials to rework draft regulations tied to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the law passed in December 2015 that replaces No Child Left Behind (NCLB). “The AFT does have some major concerns that parts of the proposed regulations walk away from ESSA’s promise of flexibility and opportunity,” AFT President Randi Weingarten wrote to Education Secretary John King in August, highlighting areas where federal regulators should make changes to avoid enshrining NCLB’s punitive excesses. AFT affiliates in 10 states also have submitted formal comments to the Education Department. For more, see <http://go.aft.org/AE316news1>.

“MIND THE GAP” IN TEACHER PAY

The Economic Policy Institute’s latest report on teacher pay shows a growing compensation gap. Teachers today earn 17 percent less than workers with similar qualifications—skyrocketing from just a 1.8 percent difference in 1994, according to *The Teacher Pay Gap Is Wider Than Ever*. The report is a scathing indictment of how this country values educators, says AFT President Randi Weingarten, and “highlights the hypocrisy” of paying lip service to teaching and teachers while failing to invest in the workforce. One bright spot: the wage gap for teachers represented by unions was 6 percentage points less than for those without a union. The full report is available at www.bit.ly/2axS4En.

The Teacher Wage Gap Grew from -5.5 Percent in 1979 to a Record -17.0 Percent in 2015



Wage gap between public school teachers and similar workers, 1979–2015

NOTE: FIGURE COMPARES WEEKLY WAGES. REGRESSION-ADJUSTED ESTIMATES INCLUDE CONTROLS FOR AGE (QUARTIC), EDUCATION, RACE/ETHNICITY, GEOGRAPHICAL REGION, MARITAL STATUS, AND GENDER FOR THE POOLED SAMPLE. DATA ARE FOR WORKERS AGE 18–64 WITH POSITIVE WAGES (EXCLUDING SELF-EMPLOYED WORKERS). NON-IMPUTED DATA ARE NOT AVAILABLE FOR 1994 AND 1995; DATA POINTS FOR THESE YEARS HAVE BEEN EXTRAPOLATED AND ARE REPRESENTED BY DOTTED LINES (SEE APPENDIX A IN REPORT FOR MORE DETAIL).

SOURCE: SYLVIA A. ALLEGRETTO AND LAWRENCE MISHLE, *THE TEACHER PAY GAP IS WIDER THAN EVER*, PAGE 8.

Project-Based Learning

(Continued from page 11)

words while reading, the wrap-up would be an opportunity for students to share occasions during their small-group, partner, and/or individual work when they came across words that were unfamiliar to them and how they tried to figure out their meanings. Whole-class wrap-up is also a great time to remind students of the purpose of and audience for their project—the reason for all their hard work.

Informational text has long been neglected in U.S. elementary classrooms. Although I welcome a move toward greater use of informational text, this move must be made carefully.

Project-based approaches may help us avoid many of the potential pitfalls of informational reading and writing instruction. Among other things, that's because projects often involve

Although I welcome a move toward greater use of informational text, this move must be made carefully.

solving a problem, addressing a need, or answering a question—purposes for reading informational text. Moreover, projects often involve conveying solutions to problems, using text to address needs, and communicating answers to questions—purposes for writing informational text.

This is not to say that project-based learning doesn't have potential pitfalls of its own. (For example, it often does not sufficiently incorporate specific research-supported instructional practices, such as those discussed earlier in regard to whole-class lessons.) And it is also not to say that project-based learning can only be used with informational reading and writing; it can be used with noninformational genres.²⁴ But it is to say that for informational texts, project-based learning is a great match. □

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Teacher Diversity

(Continued from page 19)

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9. The research team was unable to obtain the data to calculate the black teacher population loss in Washington, D.C. As Washington, D.C., had the largest loss of the share of black teachers, it might very well also have the largest decline in the population of black teachers.

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Young Readers

(Continued from page 28)

can start to jump over the polarizing debates and put energy into helping young students become literate across media of all kinds.

The American Academy of Pediatrics hit this nail on the head when it published its preview in October about why it was rethinking its screen time guidelines. “In a world where ‘screen time’ is becoming simply ‘time,’” the article said, “our policies must evolve or become obsolete.”¹² The lines that used to define “screen time,” “learning time,” and “play time” have become so blurred as to be meaningless. Now it’s about how well we’re using our time and resources with children. Learning can happen via book or screen, or, in the case of e-books, both. Let’s address how learning can and should be happening regardless of the medium.

The children and families of the 21st century will grow up with screens and digital media everywhere. Educators and parents will need new models for how to use these tools to promote learning. Instead of pushing screens away, let’s put them into the hands of adults and children to use *together* to learn and grow. In using technology to help educate children, the class of 2030 needs all of us to embrace this third way. □

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Literature in High School

(Continued from page 31)

Despite this powerful—and at times painful—journey, I helped my students see the novel’s conclusion as an optimistic one. We have a sense, as the poet Denise Levertov writes, of seeing grief become “a new pearl-grey thread entering the weave” of Holden’s life. He won’t ever stop grieving his loss, but maybe he can use that emotion to benefit others. He wants to be, Holden tells Phoebe, “the catcher in the rye,” someone who saves children from falling off a cliff. To that end, we might imagine Holden as an effective high school guidance counselor, or a psychotherapist treating psychological suffering in young people. Out of terrible grief, the novel suggests, can arise a purpose that endures over a lifetime.

Much of this analysis of the novel would not be available to students from their own reading. It takes a teacher, a knowledgeable guide, to help them understand the universal truths of a literary work. This path to understanding involves question and answer, the teacher talking, the students listening, and then discussing the text together. That’s the nature of any introduction to a topic, from the study of literature to ancient Greek art to Australian football, where one person knows a great deal more about the subject than everyone else in the room.

As a literature teacher, I always sought to demonstrate how these works can evoke students’ deepest thoughts and feelings. They can see they are not alone.

Aside from classroom discussions, my students’ written work showed me how much they were absorbing and reflecting on what we read. On paper, they weren’t inhibited by the theater of the classroom. They could communicate what they thought, without worrying how they would appear to their peers. In their essays, they could be more deliberate, more vulnerable to a new idea, and more willing to allow in some painful insight. I never placed too much emphasis on what students said in class. It was always in writing that students showed me what they were thinking.

And what exactly were they thinking? Perhaps that a man angry at a lousy employee could eventually yield to his wife’s kindness. That yearning for a guide through life is universal. That grief over loss can be expressed. All this, and much more, can find its way into a high school classroom through the consideration of literature. □

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