AMERICAN Educator

A JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY, RESEARCH, AND IDEAS

HOW TO BUILD AN INCLUSIVE AMERICA

CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER ERIC K. WARD HAS AN INSPIRING IDEA | PAGE 4

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Recovering Together

From Aspiration to Action

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

TWO YEARS OF pandemic upheavals have taken an enormous toll, and educators and families with school-age children have been deeply affected. Every day, they are striving to overcome challenges, accelerate learning, and bounce back from disruption and anxiety. And in the places where they are working hand in hand, they are succeeding. Because we have long known what some political operatives are now trying to use to their advantage: it is always important for parents to be engaged in their children's schooling. And unlike what these same pundits claim, we always want parents to be involved. I have seen it firsthand in my 100-plus school visits since April 2021. Educators are heroic in supporting our kids, despite the challenges of the pandemic and the political attacks, and parents see that.

The pollsters are seeing it too: the vast majority of parents praise their schools' handling of health and academic concerns. Following the November elections and all the hype Glenn Youngkin in Virginia and others were saying about their newfound way to divide teachers and parents, we did a deep dive of parental attitudes and found quite a different story. Parents give very high ratings to their children's teachers and to teachers' unions. Parents are very satisfied with the job public schools are doing to keep children safe, support their social and emotional well-being, and help them achieve their potential. And, despite what the fearmongers claim, parents want their children to learn honest history and to value diversity and differences. A few key findings are shown on page 2; for more, visit go.aft.org/i6i.

And now, where's Gov. Youngkin? A poll from the Wason Center for Civic Leadership found that only 41 percent of Virginia voters approve of his job performance. Nearly two-thirds want students to learn the ongoing impact of racism, and 57 percent oppose banning critical race theory in public schools.*

So why are some operatives stirring up controversy, stoking divisions, and miring public schools in political squabbles instead of supporting students' healing and progress? For some, it's about winning elections; for others, it's about driving families away from public schools. It is clearly not about helping our students recover.

America is at its best when we come together.

Journalist Ronald Brownstein explored how schools are getting swept up in culture wars, particularly "the effort by Republican-led states to censor how teachers talk about present and historic racial and gender inequities."† Jeffrey Sachs, a political scientist who tracks these bills for the free-speech group PEN America, told Brownstein he expects that ultimately all 23 Republican-controlled states will approve some version of these measures.

Make no mistake about what these extremists are doing. They are banning books that tell the stories of Black people, of gay people, of Jewish people. They are passing laws restricting teachers from teaching about true but troubling parts of our history. And they are setting up tip lines and offering bounties to "report" teachers, in an attempt to censor discussions of race, gender, and what some lawmakers deem to be "divisive" concepts.

I taught social studies and civics. I know that teachers don't tell students what to think; we teach them how to think by helping them become more analytical. We teach honest, age-appropriate history, the good and the bad—not a mythology that erases painful truths. This is how we help the next generation become well-informed, well-read, and engaged citizens.

In this moment, more than ever in my memory, we need to find ways to come together to solve problems. And our children need to see us do just that. A
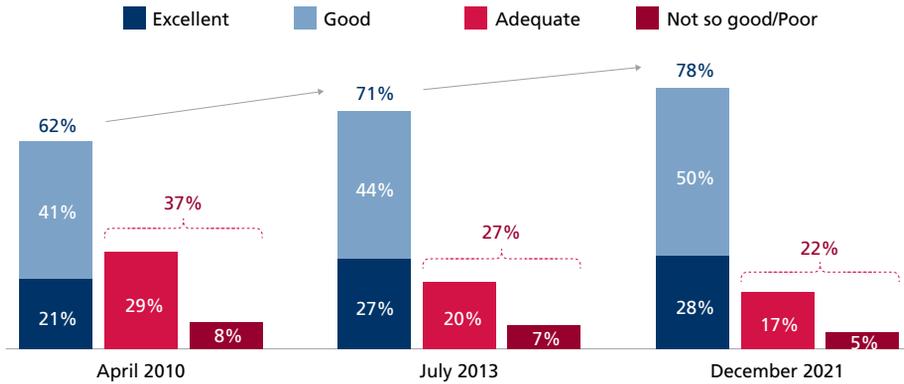

PHOTO: MEGAN ACKERMAN

recent report from the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation describes a "civic virus" leading many Americans to separate and segregate themselves:

> What is happening is rooted much less in polarization—when people hold a steadfast commitment to ideological positions—and much more in the human need for community and belonging. Right now, people ... are hunkered down in groups of like-minded folks, seeking protection from those with different views, different perspectives, and different experiences. And yet, people express real concerns about the toll joining these like-minded groups has on them and others....
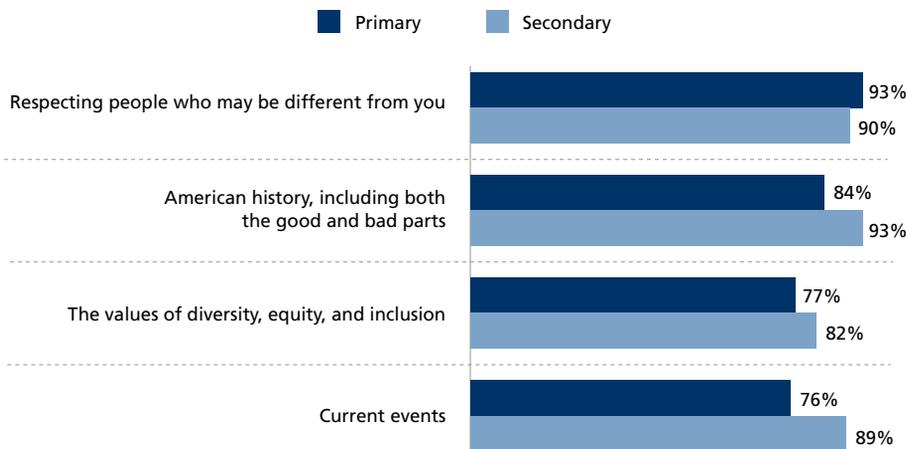
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*For more results from the February 2022 poll, see go.aft.org/fpu.
†Brownstein's article, "Why Schools Are Taking Center Stage in the Culture Wars," is available at go.aft.org/ox1.

Parents give high scores to public school teachers' quality and performance:

Excellent   **Good**   **Adequate**   **Not so good/Poor**

April 2010
- 62%
- 41%
- 21%
- 37%
- 29%
- 8%

July 2013
- 71%
- 44%
- 27%
- 27%
- 20%
- 7%

December 2021
- 78%
- 50%
- 28%
- 22%
- 17%
- 5%

Parents believe teachers' unions have a positive effect on the quality of education:

Positive effect   **Negative effect**   **Not much effect**

2013
- 34% (+8)
- 26%
- 28%

2021
- 48% (+31)
- 17%
- 21%
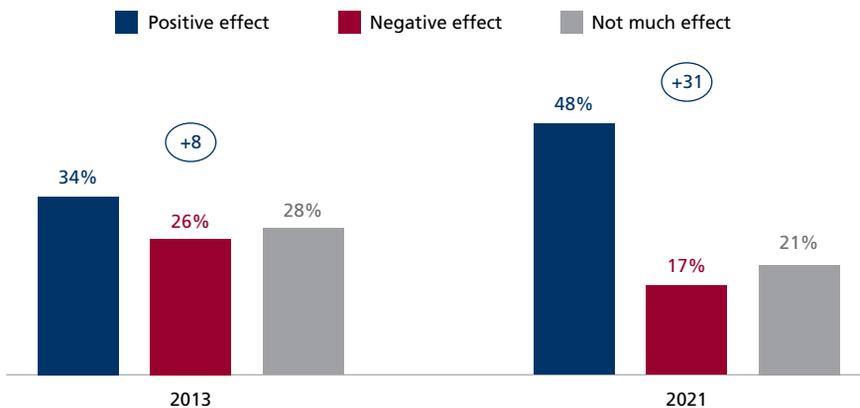
Parents want their primary- and secondary-school children to learn honest history and to value differences:

Primary   **Secondary**

Respecting people who may be different from you
- Primary: 93%
- Secondary: 90%

American history, including both the good and bad parts
- Primary: 84%
- Secondary: 93%

The values of diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Primary: 77%
- Secondary: 82%

Current events
- Primary: 76%
- Secondary: 89%

We must begin to spread a positive contagion of authentic hope that boldly declares, "We each matter. We don't need to agree on everything, but can find enough agreement to move forward. We can create a new trajectory of hope."[‡]

Our public schools are vital for creating this new trajectory. Parents and educators are essential partners, helping students come back from disappointment and loss, showing up and listening to one another, and showing grace and gratitude. America is at its best when we come together.

Understanding that there are forces trying to divide us gives us a key to restoring our civic health and strengthening our country. Alexis de Tocqueville gave us a key by observing how crucial embracing diversity and solidarity is for our democracy. And this issue of *American Educator* offers more keys. Civil rights leader Eric K. Ward gives us a key by sharing his story of empathizing with others—even white nationalists. Fourth-grade teacher Christopher Albrecht gives us a key by revealing the supports educators need to thrive. Leo Casey and Mary Cathryn Ricker, past and present leaders of the Albert Shanker Institute, give us a key by shining a light on how public education, democracy, and the union movement reinforce each other and strengthen people's voices. Higher education researcher Stephanie Hall gives us a key by explaining how austerity budgets have forced public colleges and universities into harmful partnerships for online programs—and what we can do about it.

Every moment in history, and every new day, can be viewed through a lens of hope or fear, aspiration or anger. We have seen how anger can consume and divide people. But we know that aspiration can lead to understanding our differences and having empathy for one another's fears. It leads to knowing that our shared hope for a better life is not a zero-sum game—that we all benefit from access to good jobs, high-quality healthcare, effective public schools and colleges, freedom from discrimination, and a voice in our democracy. I think we can all agree that, as individuals and as a country, our hopes take us further than our fears. ☐

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AMERICAN Educator

"You're My Inspiration"

How I Came to Understand Racism in America—and What We Can Do About It

By Eric K. Ward

T here are two fundamental questions underlying the nationwide debates about racial equity, mask mandates, local control, and other controversies bedeviling public education today: *Who is an American?* and *What is America becoming?* This is always the conversation we're having as a country, even when it seems like we're talking about something else.

Early in my 30 years of leading racial equity trainings, I became a firm believer that how we have this conversation matters. We do best when we ground ourselves in stories.

This is the story of how I came to understand race and racism in America. This story has everything to do with how I came to understand unconscious bias, white nationalism, and the fundamental threat to democracy we face today—and what each of us can do about it.

I'll take you back to my early years. But where I want to start is somewhere in the middle, about 25 years ago.

Eric K. Ward, a nationally recognized expert on the relationship between authoritarian movements, hate violence, and preserving inclusive democracy, is the recipient of the 2021 Civil Courage Prize—the first American in the award's 21-year history. He currently serves as the executive director of Western States Center, which created one of the first widely used Dismantling Racism organizational change programs in the 1990s and currently equips educators with the Confronting White Nationalism in Schools *and* Indigenizing Love *toolkits. Ward is also a senior fellow with the Southern Poverty Law Center, the chair of Proteus Fund, and an advisor to the Center for Entertainment & Civic Health. He is grateful to Race Forward for contributing the framework and teaching tools presented here.*

Not in Our Town

In the mid-1990s, the documentary *Not in Our Town II* told the story of communities following in the footsteps of Billings, Montana, as neighbors united in response to a series of racist and antisemitic hate crimes.[1] I was the field organizer for the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment at the time, working with over 120 local anti-bigotry community groups in six western states. We were cosponsoring dozens of screenings with discussions featuring local anti-hate leaders.

On one particular night, I travelled down to Eugene, Oregon, where I'd gotten my start as an anti-bigotry organizer and helped found a program called Communities Against Hate. Before the screening started, I was standing under the lights outside the entry to the venue, a public utility meeting hall that was in a pretty deserted part of town, greeting people. We'd heard that neo-Nazis might attempt to disrupt the event. All of a sudden, I saw them marching our way: about a dozen Aryan Pride members decked out in full regalia. I hustled everyone inside and turned to face the group approaching us. At my side was a local rabbi, the only person who had refused my plea to go indoors. He made it clear: he simply wasn't going to leave me, let the chips fall where they may.

These were serious guys, violent guys. As they surrounded the rabbi and me, I knew it could go one of two ways. De-escalation was the direction I was determined to try. So I started asking them who was who. Who was a Klan member, who was a Christian Identity adherent, who was neo-Nazi? These were among the subculture variants of white nationalism at the time.

They weren't sure what to do with my curiosity, my willingness to engage them without showing fear or launching a counterattack. One of them asked if they could come in. "Sure," I said. "It's a public event. But you can't have your bandannas covering your faces." I explained that doing so could get them arrested, and it wasn't my goal to see people get caught up and further drawn into the criminal justice system.

After some negotiating, they took off their face coverings and came into the screening. After a while, I saw their leader head into the restroom. I gave him a minute, then followed him in there. I stuck out my hand and introduced myself. "My name is Eric Ward. What's yours?" Here, he faced another dilemma. Shake the hand of a Black man? Or decline and look cowardly? He shook my hand. We rejoined the rest of the audience, and I got the program started.

After our speakers and the screening of the film, we did a Q&A. I took some of the neo-Nazis' questions, and in response I drew a line and made an offer. "We're not here to have a debate," I said. "You can organize your own event for a debate. But if you want to have a real conversation, I'm sure plenty in this town would be willing to sit down and talk with you."

The rabbi raised his hand and said, "I'd be willing." Then the head of the local NAACP chapter raised his hand: "I'd be willing."

We left that night without any violence taking place. And over the months that followed, the leader of those neo-Nazis—I'll call him Doug—reached out to the rabbi and the NAACP leader and started having conversations with them. This didn't make him renounce his white power position. Neither did being chased down and physically assaulted by a grouping of anti-fascists and anti-racist skinheads in town. But one day he turned on the TV so that his beloved young daughter could watch her favorite show.

After her program ended, *Sesame Street* came on. He glanced up and saw the screen filled with characters of color. Infuriated, he marched over to turn off the TV. His daughter burst out in tears. It broke him emotionally. Doug told me later that it was his shame in that moment that signaled the beginning of his departure from the white power movement.

After Doug renounced his neo-Nazi ties, his former comrades beat him so severely at his job site that he was hospitalized. That didn't stop him from engaging in public events where he apologized and sought repair for the harm he had caused. We're still in touch decades later. He's become a sought-after artist whose work I greatly admire. I've told him more than once, "You're my inspiration." He responds, "What do you mean?" I tell him, "Each night when you go to sleep, you're proof a better world is possible. Everyone is redeemable."

I tell you this story to convey a point. When Doug saw the world through his daughter's eyes, he was connecting through values instead of ideology—that's where change can happen. Doug's story proves that racial prejudice and violence are learned and can be unlearned.

Most folks might look at Doug and me and see two opposite ends of any number of spectrums. But there's not much difference between us. The truth is, just like the increasing number of people of color joining violent hate groups, I could have been an unrepentant Doug. The reasons I didn't explain how I've come to understand race in America.

> Racial prejudice and violence are learned and can be unlearned.

The Air I Breathed

As a young Black male who came of age in the Reagan years, I wasn't destined to become a civil rights leader. In fact, I very easily could have become Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio, or Brandon Rapolla, one of the increasing number of people of color from my age group joining the white-nationalist-driven coalition known as the alt-right.[2]

I grew up in Southern California. Two generations before me, my family arrived as refugees from Shepherdsville, Kentucky, after they witnessed the lynching of Marie Thompson, a Black woman who had dared to stand up to a white man against the beating of her son in the early 1900s. When I was in sixth grade, my mom and I moved from Los Angeles down to Long Beach just as the school district was going through court-ordered desegregation.

Long Beach is planted on the line that locals call the Orange Curtain, the borderland between the working-class and immigrant neighborhoods of southern Los Angeles County and the white conservative suburbs of Orange County. By the time I arrived in the mid-1970s, this endless sprawl of white flight was
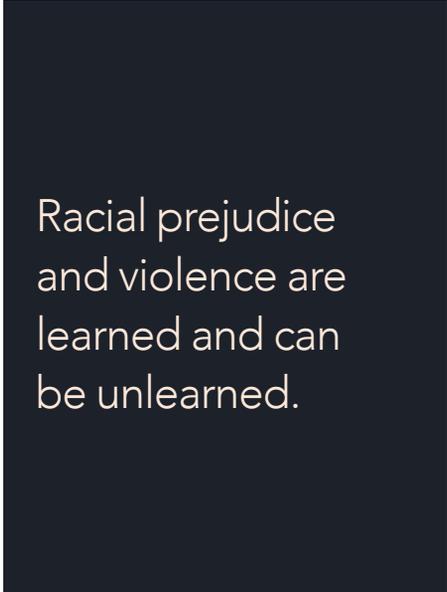
increasingly interrupted by people of color looking for affordable housing in safe neighborhoods. White nationalism was part of the scenery. Just down the street from our apartment was an outpost of the John Birch Society, which fought the civil rights movement and described the communist menace as an international cabal.

I was bused to school in a middle-class suburb through the fanciest neighborhoods I'd ever seen, neighborhoods where white adults rolled down their car windows to call us monkeys or tell us to go back to Africa. At school, white kids initialed "SWP" on their desks: Supreme White Power. One of our local celebrities was Wally George, a public access television star whose show, *Hot Seat*, was a forerunner to the hate radio of shock jocks like Rush Limbaugh and Tucker Carlson. As teenagers, we'd get stoned and watch George's show for laughs. But there was fear beneath the laughter. Neo-Nazis, a kid on the bus told us one morning, were marching in a nearby park.

I was raised by a working-poor single mom. We weren't anything anyone would call political. We were a Black family in a conservative town in a conservative time. The civil rights and social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s had been demobilized by government harassment or self-destructed through political violence and infighting. The political motivations of the Black Panthers were being replaced by the economic desperation of the Bloods and the Crips. Ronald Reagan was governor of the state for most of my childhood, then president when I was in high school.

I knew from an early age that I was headed for the military. Long Beach was a Navy town. All through high school, I was an enthusiastic member of the Naval Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps. I was promoted to third in command as a cadet. I even won leadership awards from the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. I spent spring vacations on naval warships attending mini boot camps, including one that had its own mock prisoner of war camp. I pre-enlisted in the Navy when I turned 17 and went off to boot camp just after my 18th birthday.

I've always seen myself as patriotic. Not because I think there is something inherently special about the place I was born, but because there are things unique to it that I've become familiar with. Back in high school, I don't think "America First" would have sounded as ominous to me as it does now, depending on whose mouth it is uttered from. I clearly wasn't as xenophobic as most of the white folks around me, but like all Americans, Black folks grew up immersed in xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, and racism—it was the air we also breathed.

So how did I escape becoming a product of my environment? How did I not end up as Enrique Tarrio?

First, I knew what it was like to be a target of bigotry and an "other." I remember distinctly the day I decided I wasn't going to run from it anymore. That day in ninth grade I stood my ground as a group of white college students pulled over to attack my friends and me for simply walking to our bus stop in what they considered their neighborhood. I took a beating. But it was in that moment when I realized that the fight against bigotry is important, that all of us are obligated to draw a moral barrier against hate. I didn't tolerate bullying among my friends, either. I was always trying to find ways to interrupt and de-escalate.

Second, I was fortunate to find my place in a music scene where my musical identity became as strong as my racial identity. After a medical discharge from the Navy, the diverse punk scene became my home. It gave me friends for life—Black, white, Latinx, Asian, and Pacific Islander, US born and undocumented. Those relationships and the alternative identities the scene conferred took me off the path of ultranationalism.

Third, when I moved in my early 20s to Oregon—from the values-contested but multiracial scene in Southern California to the proclaimed liberal but predominantly white college town of Eugene—I was directly challenged by the contradictions of the national mores with which I'd been raised and socialized. I'd been shaped by these beliefs: *You have to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. The world is what you make it. You might encounter oppression, but keep a stiff upper lip and work harder than the rest, and you shall overcome.*

Facing the Reality of Systemic Racism

Interestingly enough, it was when I got to Eugene that those false narratives shattered before my eyes. At first, Eugene seemed unreal. It was so clean compared with the neighborhoods I had grown up in. The air smelled amazing! When I called home to my mom, I told her, "It's so green, it's like Disneyland!" I had nothing else with which to compare the green trees.

Everyone seemed nice. But strangely, this kid who had been working since he was 13, with a nice thick résumé, a great smile, and loads of charm, somehow couldn't get a job. I applied at workplace after workplace, thinking, "It must be me." I had no understanding of the impact of systemic racism at the time.

Finally, someone decided to take a chance on me. It's important to note that the only person who would hire this young Black male in liberal Eugene in 1986 was a conservative white Republican man who lived on the rural outer edge of town. We spent eight to twelve hours a day together, five days a week, installing insulation in crawl spaces under houses.

A year later, when I enrolled at the community college, I got a work study job as the receptionist at the campus multicultural center. A bunch of us on staff were sent to a three-day training on racism, hosted by Clergy & Laity Concerned (which later gave me my first professional job as an organizer).

The first day opened with a reading from Christopher Columbus' diary, recording his genocidal disdain for the Taíno people. "With fifty men they can all be subjugated and made to do what is required of them," he observed.[3] The trainers proceeded to outline a history of racism in America. "There's a *history*?," I thought to myself. "How come I never heard *this* before?" I real-

ized what I'd experienced when I struggled to find a job. *This is a system—a set of patterns that have played out historically in the United States. It doesn't matter if I pull myself up by my bootstraps or work 10 times harder. At the end of the day, those things will never balance out.*

I went home to my multicultural household, the close-as-family friends I'd grown up with who'd persuaded me to follow them to Eugene. I was enraged. I stormed into my room, put on my favorite music, and dropped out for the rest of the day. I felt I'd been taken advantage of, manipulated. I sat there listening to my music while my brain tried to process the anger I was finally feeling.

The next morning, I was back at the training, clearly agitated. The trainer asked how I was doing. I had no idea how I was doing. I was just so enraged. He said something I've held to this day: "There are going to be days you'll wish you could unlearn what you know now. Days where you wish you could close the door again and go back to how you thought you knew the world. But you can't. You have to carry this. It's called truth. The choice you get to make is *how you carry it*. You can hold on to the rage—but it will consume you and everything around you. Or you can decide to transform that rage to redemption."

This is what it means to me when I hear the phrase "redeem the soul of America."[4] The invitation—to transform expressions of my rage over injustice into work that could redeem the soul of our country—tapped into everything I knew about being an American. The rage hasn't gone away; it's still right below the surface. But I've chosen not to internalize or export it. I've tried instead to find a path toward the construction of a patriotic ideal: inclusive democracy.

Sorting, Prejudice, Racism

It's scary to admit that most of us aren't so different from those who became neo-Nazis or alt-right leaders. In fact, research[5] Western States Center commissioned recently found that about 40 percent of Oregonians agree with statements that align with two core arguments of white nationalism and other far-right groups: "America must protect and preserve its white European heritage," and "White people in America face discrimination and unfair treatment based on race." (Importantly, 86 percent agree with protecting America's multicultural heritage and 70 percent agree that people of color face race-based discrimination.)

The white nationalist movement is very clear about the type of society they want for America.[6] Most Americans do not seek that version of the future; even those who agree with some of the movement's underlying beliefs do not buy into the full white nationalist vision. But what is the future most Americans want?

Being honest about the appeal of core white nationalist beliefs to many Americans in this moment is a good place to anchor our conversation about what it means to be an American and how we create that America together. Talking about these beliefs tunes into a lot of vulnerability. As I have learned from Race Forward, an organization committed to racial equity where I have served as a senior fellow, research shows that anxiety is not uncommon in interracial interactions, and that anxiety—even without any negative intent—can result in unfriendly behaviors.[7]

There is a painful, persistent legacy of racism in this country that affects every one of us, every day.[8] What we have to remember is that while many of us are not responsible for creating that legacy, we are responsible for what we choose to do with that legacy today.

All of us grew up learning how to sort our world. I remember being praised as a toddler when I fit different geometric shaped blocks into the corresponding cutouts in one of my earliest toys. I remember the *Sesame Street* jingle, *One of these things is not like the others; one of these things doesn't belong. Can you tell which thing is not like the others by the time I finish this song?* Sorting is how the world is structured. We need it to avoid chaos, to recognize danger and move out of its way. The problem is, sorting can be inequitable. Sorting into "in" and "out" groups creates stereotypes and prejudice.

I remember a dramatic example of the power of stereotyping from the late 1980s, at a rally for Indigenous religious rights. I was there with one of my most influential mentors. Her young daughter started tugging on her jacket for attention. "Mom! Mom! Are these Indians?" Mom answered, "Yes." Her daughter replied, "Indians are bad!" This mentor was a longtime anti-racist white feminist, one of the three women who taught me my foundational knowledge about race and racism. She was fearless, spoke truth to power. I'd watched her stand up to US Immigration and Naturalization Service agents and be arrested for civil disobedience. The belief uttered by her child is not something her child would have been explicitly taught at home.

My mentor told her daughter, "That's not true, but we'll talk about it when we get home." Later she relayed the rest of the story to me. She reminded her daughter of two people she knew who were Native Americans. So where did her daughter get the idea that Native Americans were bad people? Earlier that week, she'd seen a *Popeye* cartoon that featured stereotypical racist images of a character with a headdress and tomahawk chasing the heroes around and trying to hurt them.

Fortunately, the intervention by her mother helped this child to move past the fears generated by the cartoon. Her mom connected her back to real-world relationships she had with real-world people of Indigenous descent. But imagine if they hadn't attended that religious freedom rally, if the daughter hadn't had an opportunity to express her fears. How long would they have stayed with her? Most likely, after five or ten years she wouldn't have remembered the cartoon, but the feeling probably would have laid dormant for much longer as an unconscious anxiety in relationship to "the other."

Real-world people and relationships are beneficial for reducing biases.[9] This is why persistent residential segregation is such a danger to America's democracy.[10] It's also why public schools continue to be centered as cultural battlegrounds by those uncomfortable with America's shifting demographics.[11] Schools

> While many of us are not responsible for creating the legacy of racism, we are responsible for what we choose to do with that legacy today.

are one of the few places where folks more regularly interact across lines of race, national origin, religion, class, and gender (even though white students still tend to be clustered together,[12] despite school integration having increased somewhat over the past 25 years[13]).

Our Shared Humanity

I am convinced that the single greatest barrier to unifying "We the people" is racial segregation. Systemic racism ensures that most of us spend far too little time with those who differ from us. We barely know each other. It's part of what allows so many to see governance structures as "them" and not "all of us."[14]

> America *is* possible. What's complicated is sustaining the *desire* to become a singular, multiracial, united country.

Strangers put in a house together may not get along right away—especially strangers who've been told lies about each other, whose ancestors did harm, or who've been taught that somebody else's human rights are their loss. But when we have a chance to tell each other our stories and to feel fully heard, we reconnect to what we've forgotten: our shared humanity. On the level of basic needs and values, we're not as different as those politicians who profit from the chaos of division would like us to believe.[15]

A certain amount of tension is always going to be present in a pluralistic, multiracial society. The goal of a functioning democracy is not to make intergroup tensions go away. Rather, the goal of a healthy democracy is to provide a means to manage those tensions so they don't undermine opportunity and justice for all. When systems of bias ensure that we can't get to know each other, when we remain separated by the stereotypes and prejudice of systemic segregation, we all lose. There's a real cost, not just socially and ethically, but also economically.

A 2020 study[16] put a price tag on how much discrimination against African Americans has cost the US economy: $16 trillion over 20 years. That's three-quarters of the entire gross domestic product (GDP) of the United States in 2019.[17] In addition, if the United States were to end discrimination against Black people in education, wages, housing, and investment (e.g., business loans), GDP would grow by $5 trillion over the next five years, according to the study. Imagine, $1 trillion a year generated simply by not discriminating! Think of the good that we as a country could do with those newly freed resources.

Another recent study documented the economic costs of discrimination, finding that raising the average income of people of color to the average income of white people (by eliminating disparities in education, health, and opportunities) would increase total US earnings by 15 percent, representing a gain of $1 trillion.[18] Similarly, a 2013 study estimated that closing the earnings gap by

2030, when people of color are expected to comprise 46 percent of the working-age population, would increase GDP by about $5 trillion per year.[19]

So what do we do about the cost of racism? How do we move from this broken legacy to a future that works for all?

Understanding Racism: A Framework

I believe that the more folks understand about racism, the better able they are to intervene.* More knowledge is generally a good thing—and so is the opportunity to practice that knowledge. That said, understanding racism is not that complicated. Race Forward has a simple, practical framework we can all put to use.

My goal in sharing this framework with you is to help you (and those you work with and teach) understand key concepts central to advocating for racial equity, including how to recognize and address implicit bias. I'll touch on what you can do to be a stronger advocate for racial equity and how to navigate resistance to change.

The concepts and tools I'm about to share—those I began learning from the trainers and organizers who first taught me to understand racism in Eugene and that I continue to use in the work I'm privileged to do today—have deeply impacted my life. They've made me a better American and allowed me to embrace my own patriotism in relationship to my community and country.

Let's start with what should be a given: racial inequity in the United States is not merely a matter of opinion. Race is still the leading determinant in life outcomes in America. Pick any area of life—education, health, jobs, housing, criminal justice—and one's race is likely to determine one's success.[20]

The most powerful statistic that came out of an examination of changes needed in local government and policing in Ferguson, Missouri, was the fact that racial segregation is so severe, and some Black communities are so under-resourced, that the difference in life expectancy by zip code is up to 35 years.[21] *Thirty-five years*—let that sink in. That's a full lifetime for some!

Persistent racial disparities are not natural or inevitable. They were created. For hundreds of years, governments and other institutions in America have built and maintained racial inequity through policy and practice.[22]

For much of our nation's history, America has been two societies, separate and unequal. This led the historian and civil rights leader Vincent Harding to write a seminal essay, "Is America Possible?"[23] I embrace Harding's answer: "Yes, yes, yes, America *is* possible. It *will* be. It *must* be."[24] I see myself as a citizen of a country that has yet to fully exist. Our country has struggled in earnest through many generations to become *one* country, an actual *United* States. Much of that struggle is the terrain of the racial equity work we're focused on here.

America is possible. As indicated by the studies referenced earlier, it is even *profitable*. What's complicated is sustaining the *desire* to become a singular, multiracial, united country.

Normalizing the Conversation

Whether you've been nodding your head in agreement with me thus far or registering some doubts or objections, I'd like you to

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*For research on how increasing knowledge of historical racism increases awareness of and desire to end current racism, see "Learning History, Facing Reality" in the Spring 2021 issue of *American Educator*: aft.org/ae/spring2021/salter.

consider three baseline questions. Try not to overthink your responses. Just notice what comes up right away.

True or false?
1. All hiring and promotion decisions should be based solely on merit.
2. To get to greater equity, some of us must lose something.
3. I believe we can end racial inequity.

Asking these questions of each other and being curious about how we respond is part of normalizing the conversation about race and racism. This is a conversation that does not benefit from political posturing. It's a conversation about our values and about aligning our values when it comes to race.

According to a 2019 survey, we're conflicted regarding talking about race. Although nearly two-thirds of Black and Asian adults said they often or sometimes talk about race, only about 50 percent of white and Hispanic adults did so. Most white adults reported being comfortable talking about race, but the majority (63 percent) were much more likely to have these discussions with only or mostly people of their same race. This contrasts with people of color, who reported a lower percentage of conversations about race being restricted to their same race or ethnicity: for Black respondents, 50 percent; Hispanic, 42 percent; and Asian, 37 percent.[25] Consider those facts for a minute.

Clearly, we have a way to go to normalize this conversation, to create a shared history and relationship with the subject. Race is often the elephant in the room, and racial anxiety is on the rise.[26] Racial inequities are deep and pervasive—but many of us are not even clear about what we mean by racial equity.

Equity and Equality

What's the difference between equity and equality? Let me offer a simple example.

My partner Jessica and I enjoy going out to see shows and games in large stadiums and auditoriums. Inevitably, we have to use the restroom. These venues constructed their stalls based on equality: an equal number of stalls for each gendered restroom. You already know what that means. I'm in and out in a minute, left to wait for her as she stands in a seemingly endless line. Equity would add more women's stalls or make some of the facilities all-gender.

As Race Forward defines the terms, *equality* "is sameness; everyone gets the same thing. Equality focuses on everyone getting the same opportunity, but often ignores the realities of historical exclusion and power differentials among whites and other racialized groups." *Equity*, by contrast, "ensures that outcomes in the conditions of well-being are improved for marginalized groups, lifting outcomes for all."[27]

Lack of equity is not only unfair, it has larger repercussions. Stadiums lose money as a result of the restroom wait lines. During the time I wait for Jessica outside the bathrooms, I'm not buying anything at the concession stands—I'm not engaged in community—and neither is she.

Equity is about improving how our society functions for the betterment of all. It can be thought of as the justice component of the diversity-inclusion-equity continuum. *Diversity* is essentially about *quantity*: the range and number of different identities and cultures in any given system. *Inclusion* is essentially about *quality*: the quality of participation across identities and cultures. *Equity* is about *justice*: the policies and practices that ensure equitable outcomes.

Early Learning About Race

Many of us do not learn these basic concepts in school, as my story illustrates. We tend to learn mainly from our environment when it comes to race.[28]

Take a few moments to reflect on how racially diverse your neighborhood was growing up.

- What message(s) did you get about race from living there?
- When was the first time you had a teacher of a *different* race? How often did that occur?
- When was the first time you had a teacher of the *same* race? How often did that occur?

The first time I had a teacher who was Black like me was 11th grade.

Cognitive science is revealing so much about *schemas*—the "frames" through which our brains help us understand and navigate the world. Schemas help us sort into categories, create associations, and fill in the gaps.[†] That's what was being developed in my early play with colored blocks of different shapes and when my mentor's daughter became fearful of a category of people based on a cartoon.

Racial bias, which we breathe in beginning in early childhood,[‡] tends to reside in the unconscious networks in our brains.[29] None of us is immune. Multiple studies have shown, for example, that Black educators treat Black students, especially young Black males, with bias, although to a lesser extent than white educators.[30] (Importantly, research also shows that having a Black teacher in the elementary grades increases educational attainment among Black students, particularly Black males from families with low incomes.[31])

Implicit Bias

I do lots of work to counter the white nationalist movement, where racist beliefs are explicit. But most Americans disavow racism. So why are racial inequities still so prevalent? The issue is *implicit bias* that we're not even aware we're holding.[32] It operates subconsciously and is expressed indirectly. In job searches where applicants' résumés are otherwise identical,

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†To learn more about schemas, see "Liberatory Education: Integrating the Science of Learning and Culturally Responsive Practice" in the Summer 2021 issue of *American Educator*: aft.org/ae/summer2021/hammond.

‡For practical ways to engage young children in anti-bias education, see "Teaching About Identity, Racism, and Fairness" in the Winter 2020–2021 issue of *American Educator*: aft.org/ae/winter2020-2021/derman-sparks_edwards_goins.

white-sounding names like Susan Smith will receive more callbacks than African American–sounding names like LaKeisha Washington.[33] Property managers use criminal background screenings to exclude more Black rental applicants than white applicants.[34] Worse, some whole communities adopt "crime-free housing ordinances," which capitalize on our history of overpolicing and mass incarceration of people of color to reduce rental housing access (many of these ordinances exclude those with arrests without convictions and encourage landlords to evict people they suspect have committed crimes).[35] And yet, these hiring and housing managers and local government officials likely do not consider themselves racist.

So what do we do about our implicit and unconscious biases? It's critically important that we strive to identify and openly acknowledge them. Suppressing or denying biased thoughts can actually increase prejudice rather than eradicate it.

Every day I have to remind folks that none of us is responsible for *creating* this system of inequality. But we are responsible for *confronting* the inequality that exists today and for designing equitable solutions. We need to help each other recognize where implicit bias is influencing our individual and organizational behaviors. We need to ask ourselves and each other: What might I be missing right now about racial inequities in this situation?
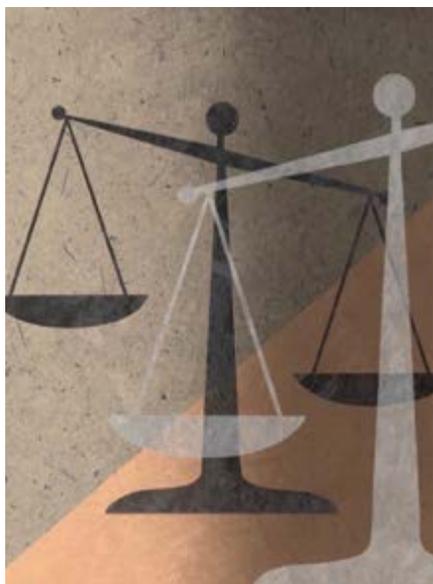
We need to normalize those conversations and invest in training and cultural shifts at the organizational level to increase capacity to shift away from racial bias in day-to-day operations. This isn't about punishing or blaming anyone. It's about developing policies and protocols that limit the opportunities for individuals' biases to come into play—that's what makes our organizations, classrooms, and communities more resistant to implicit bias.

Here's the bottom line: designing policies and protocols where racial equity is built into the way decisions are made in our schools (and our unions and other settings) means we are more likely to achieve positive, effective, and unbiased results.

An Outcome That Benefits Us All

I know many people glaze over when we start talking about policies and protocols, so let's cut to the chase. We know that our goal is to fulfill the idea of America—that all are created equal—by achieving racial equity. How will we know when we've succeeded?

We will achieve racial equity when race is no longer a determinant of life outcomes and when, through addressing racial inequity, we have improved outcomes for everyone, including white people.

This is not simply about parity. It's about lifting the floor for everyone. For example, as of the 2018–19 school year, only 80 percent of

Black students graduated high school, while 89 percent of their white peers graduated.[36] We don't just want Black students' graduation rate to match that 89 percent. We want *every* student to graduate.

When we focus on and include those subjected to the greatest inequities in changing policies, practices, and procedures that produce racial disparities, we don't take anything away from anyone—we are more likely to improve outcomes for *everyone*.

The winner-loser scarcity approach to rights and opportunities feeds the myth of "special rights" and the mistaken idea that racial equity only benefits some of us. Sadly, those misunderstandings can warp behavior: in a recent survey of white Americans who had applied to a college or university, an astonishing 34 percent (48 percent of male respondents and 16 percent of female respondents) admitted to having lied about being a racial minority on their application.[37]

Those of us working for racial equity are not trying to dominate anyone. We are simply trying to move forward as a single nation, a racially unified nation that works for all.

Racial equity is both our process *and* the outcome we seek to achieve. It is an *inclusive* approach to transform structures toward access, self-determination, redistribution, and equitable sharing of power and resources. That means shifting our focus away from blame, shame, guilt, and grievance. Instead, we need to lower the temperature and focus on

- *causes*: the history of systemic racism for which we are not to blame and the unconscious bias we are not aware of;
- *effects*: the thoroughly documented reality of racial inequities and their costs to all of us;
- *systems*: the hierarchies, structures, and policies that people before us created and that we can change; and
- *solutions*: the actions we can take individually and collectively, keeping in mind that the broader our coalitions, the more powerful our solutions will be.

Practice Asking Different Questions

Instead of asking the blame-game question, "Who's a racist?," investigate the causes: "What's causing these racial inequities?"

Instead of fixating on intentions, "What did they mean? What was their attitude?," focus on the effects: "What were the actions? What are the impacts?"

Rather than stop with individual prejudice, "What beliefs made them do it?," explore the larger context: "What institutions or systems are responsible for encouraging or perpetuating this?"

Lastly, along with focusing on today by asking "How can we fix what just happened?," prioritize our forward momentum with systemic responses explored through questions like, "What are proactive strategies and solutions to prevent this from happening again?"

We haven't always been as skillful as we need to be when it comes to asking the right questions and focusing on the most constructive path forward. All of us can point to examples of conversations on race going badly, even those led by racial equity activists. The white nationalist movement and other opponents of racial equity are quick to find those examples and try to use them to block the progress we are making. But we can't let those examples confuse us. We can't let the backlash to racial equity discourage us.

Choice Points: Which Path Do You Choose?

Our nation stands at the crossroads of change. Do we allow the gains of the 20th-century civil rights movements to be rolled back and the legacy of centuries of structural racism to persist? Or do we choose the changes that will benefit all of us, the changes that are necessary if we are to be truly one nation?

Choice points are key decision-making opportunities that influence outcomes—in this case, racial equity outcomes. If we stick with the same old choices and actions—whether out of fear, uncertainty, inertia, overwhelm, or outright resistance—we will get the same outcomes: inequities, exclusion, racism. If we choose equitable options and actions, we will achieve new outcomes: equity, inclusion, humanity.

Since you've made it this far, I'd like to congratulate you and challenge you to take the next step. Pull out a pen or tap some notes on your device. Take five minutes to note some choice points you encounter daily, weekly, monthly, and annually. On a personal level, this might be where to shop, what to buy or boycott, what causes to volunteer with or organizations to support financially, which candidates or causes you vote for, or who you spend time with socially.

On a school, college, or other institutional level, choice points might include: What should you change and prioritize in lesson plans and in programs for students, families, and staff? What items should you prioritize, add to, or cut from in the budget? Which students should you develop as leaders? What policies should you propose or modify? Which practices and organizational habits or cultural norms should you continue, change, or cut?

Now identify one choice point in your own work or life where you have some influence on a decision or course of action that could affect racial outcomes. For that choice point, identify some alternative actions that could lead to different and more equitable outcomes. Decide which option could leverage the most equitable change. Then find a buddy. Tell them about your choice point and ask for their support. Report back to them once a week until you've made some headway and are seeing results.

Ideally, involve your whole team. Your team might be the other teachers in your grade level or the other professors who teach similar courses. Or you might form a team of faculty, staff, students, and community members. Make this a team-building challenge—not a competition. I believe strongly in the power of cohorts to break isolation and support change. It's a way we can learn from each other, a mutually supportive system of accountability that allows our choice points to become more explicit and more informed by racial equity.

One example: Western States Center's Northwest Racial Equity Leaders Project brings together two dozen racial equity practitioners from local government, labor, and nonprofit organizations in Oregon and Washington for monthly calls. Through group consultation, they strengthen each other's capacity to support multiracial, democratic social movements and to center racial equity as a strategic lens that connects the diversity-inclusion-equity field to systems transformation. Having this shared community of practice provided each of them with essential support for the challenges in their own workplaces in the aftermath of George Floyd's killing and the pandemic. Can you create a similar network of your own?

By focusing on choice points within a supportive system of mutual accountability, you're less likely to perpetuate the status quo.

Small Choices That Change the Status Quo

The cumulative impact of many small choices can be as significant as the impacts of big decisions. Each of us has the power to catalyze the change we want to see in the world. That's one of the reasons educators are among my personal heroes and heroines.

Nora Flanagan, a longtime high school English teacher in Chicago, illustrates the power of a small choice and the difference between holding back and stepping out of one's comfort zone. As she told public radio station WBEZ in 2019, she grew up watching the growth of a neo-Nazi youth movement in her neighborhood on Chicago's Southwest Side. It wasn't taken seriously by adults; they "didn't think it was a big deal or weren't that bothered by it or passively condoned it."[38]

Even with that hindsight, she was initially stymied when her son, then in fifth grade, told her about Nazi graffiti in the bathroom at his school. He didn't want her to go to the principal. So she showed him how to remove the graffiti and said, "He would go in there every day and clean swastikas off the wall with an alcohol wipe."[39]

With the recent surge in white nationalists' online recruitment of middle and high school students,[40] Nora regretted not reporting the hate symbols to the staff at her son's school. She turned that regret into fuel for action, partnering with another educator, Jessica Acee, and Western States Center program director Lindsay Schubiner, to coauthor *Confronting White Nationalism in Schools: A Toolkit*.[41] (For an excerpt from the toolkit, turn to page 12.) Oregon's largest school district drew from this toolkit for its "Hate Speech Protocols"[42] distributed to parents and educators in the context of civic engagement and unrest leading into and after the 2020 presidential election.

With more than 10,000 copies now in circulation in every state in the country, Nora, Jessica, and Lindsay's work has inspired the formation of a growing network of over 200 educators who are replicating the training in their communities, sharing best practices, and piloting new curricula and response strategies to prevent students from being influenced and harassed by hateful ideologies online, in school, and in their communities. These new collaborations have resulted in a six-part resource for caregivers, *My Child Is Sharing Conspiracy Theories and Racist Memes. What Do I Say?*[43]

When it comes to getting along with each other as humans in the imperfect but still possible democracy that is this country, few of us are without regrets. My own story illustrates that working for racial equity and an inclusive multiracial democracy was not inevitable. I was fortunate to encounter some good life teachers and some key choice points. I hope my story and the other stories I've shared with you here help you embrace the necessary choices, the courageous conversations, and the commitment to equity that this moment requires. ☐

> If we choose equitable options and actions, we will achieve new outcomes: equity, inclusion, humanity.

Preventing the Spread of White Nationalism in Schools

This sidebar is adapted from *Confronting White Nationalism in Schools: A Toolkit*, which is available for free at westernstatescenter.org/schools. Through five scenarios—from a student secretly carving a swastika on a desk to openly advocating for a white pride student group—this toolkit offers practical advice for the whole school community. It also shares symbols of white nationalism to aid recognition and explains the misguided thinking inherent in five common defenses of white nationalism.

Of the many strengths of this toolkit, one that stands out is its empathy for youth who are being recruited by white nationalists. It warns staff to focus on how to meet these students' social and emotional needs (e.g., for belonging) and warns students to "Keep the health of your school community central to stated goals, rather than punishment for perpetrators. Pushback from peers can backfire, increasing tensions and seeming to justify requests for separate white entities and events." Ultimately, the toolkit's aim is to help educators "construct a democracy where everyone has value."

–EDITORS

BY NORA FLANAGAN, JESSICA ACEE, AND LINDSAY SCHUBINER

Because schools are hubs of our communities, they have become battlegrounds for extremist organizing. It's easy to miss an unfamiliar white nationalist symbol or feel unsure about how to respond to a student citing a white nationalist source in the classroom. There's a lot to keep track of when working with young people; we want to make it easier to recognize these behaviors (and those responsible) and to take action.

Everyone who engages in the life of a school is in a unique position to isolate and push back against the growing white nationalist movement and the hateful narratives it touts. It's time to own that power. Our job is to build schools where everyone feels valued and where our students can grow to be engaged citizens of an inclusive democracy.

Nora Flanagan is an English teacher at Northside College Prep High School in Chicago and a senior fellow with Western States Center. Jessica Acee is the director of Student Leadership and Activities at St. Mary's Academy in Portland and a senior fellow with Western States Center. Lindsay Schubiner is a program director with Western States Center.

All teenagers seek a sense of identity and belonging. White nationalist organizations know this and look for ways to connect with young people in order to grow their base. It takes vigilance on the part of teachers, administrators, and parents to ensure that all members of a school community feel connected in positive ways and are not left vulnerable to extremist rhetoric or recruitment.

This toolkit works best as a guide with suggestions and resources to help school communities navigate their own questions and challenges. Students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents, and other community entities can collaborate to adapt these approaches and find new solutions. We focus on high schools, but many of these resources also apply to middle schools and colleges.

Scenario: Invocation of White Nationalist Ideology

The best classroom environments support students seeking and engaging with outside sources. Research skills remain among the most vital to postsecondary success, alongside critical thinking and the ability to assess source material. White nationalist online personalities, bloggers, public speakers, and other prominent figures actively seek to influence and enlist young people with access to larger school communities. Students need support as they navigate the endless material available to them to ensure that their social, emotional, and cognitive development are not impeded by the dangerous rhetoric of extremism.

Examples

- Students citing white nationalism or extremist source material in schoolwork.
- Students citing, invoking, or parroting white nationalist source material in class discussions.
- Students distributing or promoting these materials on school property or through school-sanctioned platforms, including learning management systems or class web pages.

Suggested Approaches

Students

- If you feel comfortable, ask follow-up questions of your classmate in discussions or in peer editing situations; examine resources and viewpoints.
- If a student shares materials outside of class, bring these to the attention of a staff member you trust.
- Lead by example: research all source material, and research any sources with

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which you are not familiar to check for bias or problematic affiliations.
- Ask your teachers if they keep lists of trusted online sources or if they can prepare a lesson to help students better understand bias in source material.

Staff
- Establish assessment criteria for source material in student work, including for any structured discussions or other classroom activities to create and clarify accountability.
- Collaborate with students to set classroom policies and procedures that establish community standards for cited materials.
- Consider a workshop at the start of each year to review how students can vet source material for bias.
- Meet with the student's counselor or other wellness staff members to see if they have noticed any increase in aggression or frustration that might correspond to an interest in extremist ideology.
- Make an administrator aware of your concerns; include evidence and relevant links.

Administration
- Meet with the students and teachers involved to understand their concerns.
- As appropriate, meet with the student who cited or promoted this material to understand the appeal and interest: for what frustrations are they seeking validation from extremists?
- Consider a workshop for staff to help promote effective online research practices across disciplines. Involve your school librarian to design and implement research practices.
- Ask teachers what resources might help them reinforce effective research skills and what norms and policies have worked in their classrooms to clarify acceptable and valid source materials.
- Consider adapting some of these as standards across the school.

Parents
- A basic awareness of what kids absorb online is elemental to maintaining their safety and understanding their evolving perspectives. Sites not explicitly dedicated to white nationalist ideology—including Reddit, 4chan, and 8chan (now called 8kun)—can host robust sections where kids are actively recruited.*
- Open a conversation with your child about the spectrum of validity and bias in online resources, both academic and those rooted in personal interest. What YouTube channels do they follow? What podcasts have they heard about what subjects?
- If you have concerns, make an appointment with a counselor or staff member you feel knows your child well. If your child shares concerns with you, help them voice these concerns to staff members they trust.

Community Members
- The ability to teach and reinforce effective research skills often hinges on the resources necessary to do so. Advocate for a certified full-time librarian in each of your local schools and request information about how the school teaches research methodology.
- Consider joining or seeking election to school boards, advisory boards, or panels that help make decisions about a school's budget and goals.

Conclusion

Everyone has the right to embrace their identity, but white nationalism and other forms of bigoted extremism threaten the safety of the vulnerable, robbing us all of our humanity and the things that link us together. Students who are attracted to white nationalism are often vulnerable themselves. They may be disillusioned, feel marginalized, or struggle with untreated trauma or mental health issues. We must show them compassion when it seems the hardest to give, because that is what white nationalism cannot offer our students. We can care for our young people while also starving white nationalism of the oxygen it needs to grow. □

Success Stories

In a US history class, a student repeatedly cited white nationalist online sources, including speeches by Richard Spencer (the leader of a think tank that cloaks bigotry in intellectualism). His parents did not seem receptive to the teacher's concerns when she met with them. The teacher revised future assessment rubrics to account for the viability and academic validity of source material, ruling out the vast majority of white nationalist publications and figures.

A student used a recognized hate symbol as her avatar on a classroom discussion page. Concerned students emailed the teacher about it. When the teacher met with the student outside of class, she insisted she didn't know the image carried racist connotations. The teacher shared evidence with her from reputable sources, and they agreed that the student would remove the avatar out of respect for her classmates.

What Not to Do

Don't treat all student sources as equal; they're not. Validating white nationalism is not the same as valuing other viewpoints. Rather, it concedes credibility to rhetoric that demeans members of our school communities.

Don't sweep it away and move on. Young people are seeking and finding white nationalist sources at alarming rates. Sharing this material via schoolwork or otherwise can indicate that a student needs support. Plan and provide aftercare by engaging with school wellness staff.

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*To learn more about these and other extremist message board sites, see "Variations on a Theme? Comparing 4chan, 8kun, and Other *chans'* Far-Right '/pol' Boards" in the February 2021 issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism*: jstor.org/stable/26984798.

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Why My Educator Joy Is Thriving

And How to Build a More Supportive Educational System

By Christopher Albrecht

The last day of school ended three hours ago. I am late to dinner because I am fishing 100 rainbow trout out of our classroom's cold water fish tank. The fish came as eggs, delivered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation through a grant. One of my fourth-graders, Kathryn, fed them every day for the entire year, unless another student asked her for a turn. Kathryn is on the autism spectrum and struggles with compromise and sharing. She does well in math and reading—and she is passionate about wildlife and the outdoors. She is my fish lady of the year! My class's usual field trip to Lake Ontario was canceled because of busing challenges during the pandemic, so this year's plan is to release the fish with Kathryn's parents (an archivist and a teacher) and four classmates.

Christopher Albrecht teaches fourth grade at Fred W. Hill School in Brockport, New York, and (until a pandemic-induced furlough) was an adjunct professor of adolescent literacy and child psychology at the College at Brockport. He is the 2018 New York State Teacher of the Year and a 2019 inductee into the National Teachers Hall of Fame. Albrecht is also an author, with numerous articles and two books, The Rediscovery of Hope and Purpose: Awakening the Human Spirit *and* Unconventionally Successful: Out of the Box Thoughts and Actions that Led to Extraordinary Outcomes.

Why did not every child get a turn to feed the fish? It seems unfair. Many kids fed the fish, but they had to ask Kathryn. Kathryn has a love: wildlife. And she had a challenge: sharing. By midyear, students were in the pattern of asking Kathryn if they could help feed the fish. She was coached and supported by her two-to-one aide, Mrs. Schwartz, so that over time, Kathryn—the girl who coveted the fish like a first-time mother with a newborn—was sharing, talking, and engaging with her peers. Over the course of the year, she developed a sense of purpose and belonging. Friendships became reciprocal. Now at year's end, all Kathryn wants to do is release these fish, grown to over five inches long, into Lake Ontario with school friends.

One by one, the fish are taken from our transportation vessel, and with respect and care, slowly carried down a boat launch. Each is carefully released into the waters of Lake Ontario, the vessel growing emptier, until the last two fish remain. To Kathryn, a child who struggles with emotions, it does not seem fair that one fish would be last, so the two final rainbow trout enter the wild together. Kathryn, beaming, turns to Mrs. Schwartz and says, "I am so happy."

Officially, my summer started hours ago. Why not go home, lay in the hammock, and start cocktail hour? Teachers deserve it. I have been told by so many, "Christopher, you work too much." I do work long hours; there are many calls to my understanding wife about late dinners. I have maintained this pattern of work for all 27 years of my life as a public school teacher.

To understand my mindset, one simple fact must be accepted: happiness creates success, and success is about finding happiness. For Kathryn, the natural world was the gateway key to unlocking her willingness to regulate her emotions during the school day. It caused her to see the value of her peers. By year's end, Kathryn found happiness, and that made her success spill over everywhere.*

My belief that happiness equals success is why, at age 50, I fear retirement. My mind and body have changed. I am slower running the bases in kickball. My bifocals are changing yearly, and I lose stuff hourly in my classroom. All of this is normal and natural. However, a few parts of me have not aged. In fact, part of me believes that I may have found the fountain of youth for my spirit: the joy of teaching children, living in my community, and getting to witness learning. I love what I do. By asking myself how I got to this point, I hope the joy I feel can be shared. All teachers deserve to feel this good.

Thousands of factors shape every teacher. This is my story from my childhood to now, divided into five narratives. None is all that unusual, but a lot can be gleaned from them.

Part 1: The Foundation

I was raised by two very loving parents. My strict Italian American mother ruled at 5 foot 2 inches with her cooking spoon; she squeaked through high school before entering the workforce. My father, a German immigrant, attended restaurant trade school before coming to the United States. Neither of my parents had a firm grasp on working with me on homework or preparing me for college. They supported my education, listened to my teachers, and lovingly did the best they knew how, but neither had great school experiences.

The stigma that "disadvantaged" homes produce "disadvantaged" students needs to be squashed. Perched high on the pyramid of Bloom's taxonomy is creativity. Coupled with observation, my parents understood that I had interests and dislikes. I was an active boy, and my early report cards were exhaustingly similar from year to year: I could not keep my hands off other kids, and I did not use an indoor voice. Also, I was highly creative, good at math, responsible with property, and physically active. In many ways, this mirrored my homelife.

I was 7 the year my mother planted apricot, peach, pear, and apple trees. I helped dig the holes, but Mom decided on the locations. Years later I found out why. Each fall, we had a bountiful harvest of fruit, often twice the volume of the neighbors'. Each of the trees that my mom selected blossom in different weeks. For a blossom to pollinate and eventually produce fruit, pollen from one flower's stamen needs to fall upon the pistil of another blossom, often of a different tree, traveling to the ovary of the blossom. Nature does this mostly using wind and insects. However, when a young boy of 7 "paints" a flower with a gentle watercolor brush, the pollen gets on the bristles. If that brush is walked to another tree and a second blossom is painted, the flower is fertilized. I painted for weeks in the spring; in the fall, I picked the fruit, made jellies and jams, and prepared fruit for freezing. I had a passion for nature, the outdoors, and cooking. Early on, with my mother's help, I found purpose in my actions.

Many parents struggle to understand today's curricula, yet we desperately need their support. Once a parent (or primary caregiver) turns away from a child's education, opportunity for the child drastically narrows. Fortunately for me, my parents saw their own strengths and recognized mine. Our educational system very often is set up to validate students' strengths. We need to do the same with their families. Just like with children, our expectations of families need to be differentiated, capitalizing on the strengths of each home.

Every child deserves a loving environment where their interests are valued, creativity is encouraged, and time is spent with caring adults. The actions adults take in the home and school need to develop a sense of purpose. In my experience, students who feel purpose have confidence, hope, and a willingness to have grit when doing less desirable tasks. I did not like reading, but because it was presented to me by a mom who gave me purpose, I did not resist. Ironically, my mother was not a strong reader. A year before she passed, she admitted that she lacked lifelong confidence because of her inability to read adult books. She saw herself as uneducated—but she was a wonderful first teacher.

> I love what I do. By asking myself how I got to this point, I hope the joy I feel can be shared.

The Takeaway

The pollination of my joy for teaching can be traced back to my childhood in the 1970s. As an adult, I read nightly, teach English language arts, and am a published author. I attribute my success as a reader and writer to my mother, who struggled in reading. She did not teach me to read and write, but she imparted purpose that led to my natural desire to be educated. Her role was to find the path, hand me a paintbrush, and stay positive.

Schools have long held the heavy weight of education, but as we learn more and more about childhood, it is apparent that there is nothing standard about children. Each child is motivated by a different set of interests, both natural and nurtured. Every morning, I observe my students and change my teaching methods based on their behaviors, just like my mom did with me. Behavior issues decrease, motivation increases, and the ownership of learning goes where it should be—with the students.

My school contract states that I am obligated to be at work by 8:30 a.m. and work until 3:30 p.m. I have yet to meet a teacher who keeps these hours. In my school, we have teachers who play chess with students before school and Legos after. As needs have increased along with technology, parents and students text teachers well into the evening. So, my narrative about releasing trout is not uncommon. What I see more and more of is caring educators willing to do whatever it takes to establish trust, vision, and purpose in children.

Part 2: Creative and Confused

During my first year of teaching, I made a discovery, though at the time I did not recognize it. Appointed to a half-day middle school computer teacher position for which I was underqualified, I was a last-resort, wildcard hire at New Martinsville School in West Virginia. The internet was brand new and so was I. There were no technology standards. The simple directive from my principal was, "Teach the kids how to use the computers." The trouble was, I did not know how to use the computers.

Broke and with a wife in graduate school, I did what most first-year teachers do: I stayed late, planned my tail off, invented, created, recreated, at times faked it, then reworked it all over again. I had no idea how to work with efficiency. Not bound by standards, the crystal-clear connection between the computer, the internet, and its usefulness in the real world was never shackled. Amid chaos, there was a silver lining that I can only appreciate in hindsight: I was creating an original curriculum.

The third week of my teaching career is where this story really begins. It was a Saturday. I was toying with network cabling, and a curious student saw an open door to the school. Hours later, I had a grasp of networks, IP addresses, and HTML coding because I listened to what that student had to say. Weeks later, I had a curriculum entirely built on the thoughts of my 12-year-old students. I had the how and the why down, but the what of my teaching was conceptualized by the kids I served. In turn, I was profoundly motivated to teach this novel topic. My pedagogy has never deviated from this initial discovery.

Early in my teaching career, I spent a lot of early and late hours putting together engaging content only to fear that the lesson would fail. Great content is not effective if the delivery of the content is sterilized. Nearly 30 years later, I still am observing young teachers in the same dilemma. Successful elementary-grades teachers do not have to be masters of the entire curriculum, but they have to be eager to learn along with their students. The focus of great instruction revolves around the environment and delivery. The teacher is an artist discovering with, not only for, the students.

One more experience from early in my career is important to share. My partner teacher and I lost a student to cancer midyear during the second year of a fourth- and fifth-grade loop. It was only my fifth year in the classroom, and my partner's third. Trying everything to serve the emotional health of the class, we were in over our heads observing student behaviors that ranged from selfishness and acting out to—most unexpectedly—some kids not being affected. At the end of the year, I had a very long conversation about resigning. I was tired and frustrated; unknowingly, I had not dealt with my own grief—neither had my partner. I thought the failure of the class rested on my shoulders, and I felt ashamed.

The following year, I believe that my principal was careful about which students were placed in my class, and I began to see that there are some circumstances that we cannot control. We are teachers, not superheroes. We are human, not divine. When my student died, I did not need counseling, which is what was offered. I needed a familiar face. For me, it illustrated the worth of mentorship long after the first year.

The Takeaway

Teaching is both art and science. Though there need to be guiding standards to hold a line of equity for the sake of a fair and equal public education, a teacher's craft, the art and style of their conduct, needs years of experimentation and guidance with a system that evolves with the teacher's pace of progress.

A good teacher knows how to fail. More learning comes from a blunder than a success because success only confirms that a person is on the right path, but failure sheds light on a new path. Failure is a gift.

Part 3: The Whole Teacher

In October of 1993, I was coming to the end of my first student-teaching placement. I was young, 21 years old. Near the end of my experience, Mrs. Murawski, my third-grade teacher mentor, sat me down and told me how a teacher mentor took her under her wing 25 years prior. She explained that it was very important to her that I take on a student teacher when the time was right. The time has been right 15 times. However, an opportunity that I became part of during the 2019–20 school year redefined my understanding of mentorship.

It was spring of 2019, and I'd just become an inductee of the National Teachers Hall of Fame (NTHF) located in Kansas on the campus of Emporia State University. It is an honor that comes with connections and responsibilities. The NTHF has created a pioneering opportunity that is redefining student teaching. In Kansas, student teachers spend 16 weeks in a placement with a mentor teacher. As part of an NTHF pilot program, Jenna Pennington, a senior at Emporia State, spent 11 weeks student teaching in a fifth-grade placement in Kansas. Then, two days after completing her 11th week, she flew 1,200 miles to Rochester, New York, to finish out her final five weeks in my classroom as a fourth-grade student teacher, while also living with me and my wife.

Traditionally, a student teacher meets a mentor at school, spends the day in the classroom, and then goes home. In this unconventional program, Jenna witnessed my life at school, but she also saw firsthand something equally valuable: the delicate balance that teachers live in their communities and homes. Teaching is a lifestyle, and traditional student teaching only sheds light on part of the life of being a teacher. By living together, we quickly developed a friendship, and the depth of our conversations exceeded any that I'd had in my previous experiences with student teachers.

There were many unexpected moments and insights. There was the obvious. Jenna is from Kansas. I live and teach in upstate New York. By traveling to another part of the country, Jenna had the opportunity to experience a totally different part of America.

Whereas a dusting of snow cancels school in Kansas, Jenna was greeted by a foot of snow and the reality that snow does not close school if you live along Lake Ontario.

Evening conversations revolved less around school and more around life. She witnessed that living in the same town as I teach has a direct impact on the way I shop. She learned what it is like to be hugged by students while running errands and spent many evenings talking with my wife about what life is like being married to a teacher. Jenna was there when dinners were interrupted by a student calling for homework help, and she saw the number of calls I make to former students. Jenna came to the evening class that I taught at the College at Brockport and found out quickly that teachers are active volunteers in their communities.

The experience was only partially about observing me. Jenna brought ideas from Kansas, new and fresh ones, that opened my eyes too. She did not feel the hesitation that often happens in week one of student teaching. Weeks prior to Jenna arriving, our students began sending her 30-second video clips showcasing our school. She sent videos back. By the time Jenna arrived, personal connections had been made.

If we want young and talented teachers to be effective for years to come, they need to learn the balance between work and life. With the increasing demands on teachers, it is more important than ever for our next generation of teachers to understand this. Jenna's experience not only helped her define how to manage a classroom but also showed her how to manage living the life of a teacher. Five weeks seems short, but it was all that was needed.

My teaching is like cooking down a tomato sauce, which I loved to watch my Italian grandmother do when I was a child. It took days to boil the sauce down to the essence of flavor, and she tended to it constantly. Now, my teaching takes constant attention. I am a teacher all the time. Jenna saw this, and I know it was a lot to take in, especially because Jenna was young. However, evenings spent in pajamas talking about students, school, and life provided time to decompress. Jenna experienced a lot, but it allowed her to adopt what she liked and leave behind what did not fit her pedagogy. Teaching is an art, and all artists are different.

Why is student teaching portrayed as just an occupation? Being a teacher transcends the classroom. It is infused into our personal lives, conversations, purchases, and hearts. Getting the ultimate opportunity to share my life with a passionate and excited new teacher like Jenna not only gave her insight but fulfilled me, too. Jenna did not get to be with just a schoolteacher but a whole teacher, and it felt so validating. We talk a lot about educating the whole child. Our teacher preparation programs need to mirror this by educating the whole teacher.

The Takeaway

Being an educator is 24-7. While I shave, eat, sleep, and drive, I think about school. It is a reality that comes with the profession, but it has taken a toll on my marriage and children. As I have aged, I have learned to manage it. The trouble is some teachers do not.

I have hosted 15 student teachers and five yearlong high school interns. Though I feel that I do a great job letting each experience be rich in student interaction; discussions about style, methods, and pedagogy; observing students; and communication, the current system does not allow student teachers to see my teacher life when I am not at school. Learning how to manage a personal life

> Being a teacher transcends the classroom. It is infused into our personal lives, conversations, purchases, and hearts.

is as valuable to beginning teachers as the classroom experience. Teaching is heavily magnetic, and young teachers are passionate. They will be in their classrooms on weekends; they will take home papers to grade in the evening and make phone calls at the times convenient to families. They should know how all this tugs on eating properly, exercising, spending time with family and friends, and hobbies.

In the end, Jenna said that evenings sitting with my wife and me were just as educational as days in the classroom. Jenna now teaches fourth grade and did not have to endure a typical rookie year. Her life is balanced as well as it can be.

What is mentorship? In five weeks of not merely student teaching but living as a teacher, Jenna grew exponentially. It is time for a renaissance in teacher preparation, one that embraces the whole educator.

Part 4: Poverty or Purpose

Even as far too many schools are suffering from the tangible poverty of aging buildings, other schools are suffering from the intellectual and relational poverty of excess. The interactive whiteboards, laptops, thousands of apps—all those tools are affecting the culture of educators. Nothing will ever replace a teacher, yet students spend a lot of time on those devices.

I have a cell phone that gets turned off when I get to school. It gets turned on when the kids go home. The only exception to the rule is when I want to take a photograph. When I am teaching, I don't want to risk becoming curious and sneaking a peek at the phone. That would take my mind out of the classroom. Actions are more powerful than words; if we want our students to be mindful, students need to observe us being the same way. Students are often better at observation than adults. They pick up subtleties. If my mind is on my phone, many students will recognize that I am not mindful of them.

I have maintained a tradition with my students that has slightly selfish motives. At the end of the school year, I give them my home address. (I live in a small town, and half of the kids have trick-or-treated at my house anyways, so it is not a big deal.) Then I make

a pact: if I receive a letter from a student, I will write back and send a little something. That little something is usually a rock, feather, book, etc., that I happen to come across. Children like getting mail because it makes them feel valued. I like getting mail because it makes me feel valued too. Even more, my experience of building sustained lifelong bonds with my students through interactions like this has me feeling very loved today. To ignore this is to lose the essence, beauty, and purpose of our profession.

Students often remember their teachers for life. How often do teachers do the same? What I know is after 27 years in the classroom, I feel loved by hundreds of students because I went the extra mile. I sacrificed, but as a result I grew with joy. Some of my best friends learned in my classroom decades ago.

> Teachers are hardworking, compassionate people, but not all teachers are happy: it is time for that to change.

The Takeaway

As a young teacher, I received some good advice from my principal, Filamina Peck: "Check your personal life at the door. If your personal life cannot be left at home, take the day off." Students deserve the best a teacher can offer. Many schools have the poverty of excess. The challenges that come with distractions are much larger than schools. With infinitely increasing options, the happiness of our learners will depend on how well we are able to put those distractions aside.

It is relevant to the times we live in for teachers to have frank, nonjudgmental conversations about to what degree our personal lives should overlap with our professional duties. Years ago, a note, call, or conference was the limitation for communication between teachers and parents or teachers and students. Now there are infinite ways to communicate, blurring the personal and professional even more. Teachers deserve fulfilling personal lives—and, if we so choose, our creative efforts to build lasting bonds with our students even outside the classroom can contribute to our joy and sense of purpose.

Part 5: Educator for Life

How fast does a monarch butterfly sail in the open prairie of Nebraska? I know the answer firsthand: 7.2 miles per hour. The national parks are where I spend my summers. There is a seamlessness to my year, and this adhesion is one of many reasons I am more motivated than ever—full of a powerful and optimistic joy, curiosity, and energy to be an educator.

The summer of 2020, I went from tourist to employee through a special internship for teachers. Bridled with inquisitiveness in the year that celebrated the 100th anniversary of the passing of the 19th Amendment, I spent the summer in southeast Nebraska at Homestead National Historical Park researching the connection between women's suffrage and the Homestead Act of 1862. As it turns out,

15 states and territories granted suffrage prior to 1920, but only two, Michigan and New York, were east of the Mississippi. Developing curriculum and programs and speaking with park visitors about that history was much like being in my classroom.

But the prairie holds secrets as well. Each sunbaked evening, shortly after the park closed, I traded my uniform for running sneakers and shorts and hit the trails. On a late summer run, a monarch flew in front of me for about the length of a football field. With my running watch, I clocked its speed.

Here I am, more than two decades into a teaching career, having been pushed to exhaustion with higher levels of concern for students' well-being, increased expectations for student performance, and growing curricular demands. Last year, a global pandemic was thrown into the mix, turning my kitchen table into my remote school. Yikes! However, I am happy and more motivated than ever. I can think of no greater feeling than educating my fourth-grade students, my former students, and the visitors to the parks where I serve as a ranger. I feel joy and peace in my profession during a time of civil unrest and political division because I feel a sense of purpose through the mission to serve others.

Following my summer in Nebraska, I was thrilled to become a national park ranger in Calais, Maine, to invoke interest in a tiny island called St. Croix, one of the earliest French settlements in North America, most noted for Samuel de Champlain's early cartography. Unknown to so many, this early 1600s settlement of 79 men most likely included that year, or shortly thereafter, the first free Black person in North American history. His name was Mathieu da Costa. I enlightened visitors about this historical figure, unknown to most, who connects history, purpose, and racial equity. I see relevance in this work because we have so many unanswered questions related to racial equity. Da Costa was valued for his education (a knowledge of at least seven European languages) and his understanding of trade. His story fills a gap in our collective memory of our diverse history and develops pride.

Neither teaching nor being a park ranger will make me wealthy, but I have the riches of purpose. Though a stable income provides sustenance, purposeful employment feeds the soul.

The seamlessness of my national parks summers was a wakeup call. Visitors come to a national park to experience and learn. Do all students go to school with the same passion? Education is a collective of millions of voices of teachers and other school staff who are not household names but affect every household.

We need a revolution in education. With each passing year, I am growing happier. I am still coming to school very early, and my wife is bringing me dinner on late nights. I work these long hours because I want to. Teachers are hardworking, compassionate people, but not all teachers are happy: it is time for that to change. We want a happier world. We dream of lifelong learning. It is possible. The world is hungry for purpose and hope. Therefore, the skill of investigation needs to be cultivated, and what motivates each human being needs to be validated. What years of experience tell me is that any content can be used to spark students' love of learning. The execution of the approach—the method we choose to engage the learner—is the game-changer.

The Takeaway

There is comfort in having knowledge and confidence, and there is no price that can be put on the skill of a proactive mindset.

Community Circles, Civics, and National Parks

Addressing Student Empowerment

When I was a teacher intern in southeast Nebraska at Homestead National Historical Park, Mark Engler, who was then the superintendent, concluded meetings stating, "Let us never forget our last name." He was highlighting that we were the National Park *Service*. With this mindset, I began volunteering at the Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, New York, and likewise became a seasonal national park ranger in Maine the summer of 2021. My experiences ignited an understanding that there are nationwide needs for school-based, embedded civic practices that address personal responsibility. Like adjoining pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, the narratives of the national parks fit perfectly with cultivating civic responsibility.

School days are packed, and moral discussions take an abundance of time. With an increased need for in-person communication skills due to their erosion by technology, online learning, social distancing, and a multitude of constantly shifting factors, I devote 40 minutes of weekly classroom time to community circles, which allow students to unpack and recognize emotions and feelings within a safe environment. I introduce character-building topics, which have enhanced students' empathetic mindsets while providing time and opportunities to synthesize, listen, create original thoughts, and develop a moral foundation.

Community circles allow students to communicate more, debate with productive respect, and develop service-mindedness.

The world is fast paced. Contemplation is becoming a rare practice. If schools are going to support the development of civic-minded learners, the brakes need to be put on to slow the pace. Our community circles provide the time we need.

This school year, I brought the narrative of the events and people of Seneca Falls into our community circles. On July 19 and 20, 1848, oppressed women felt a need to create a better country and world by catalyzing the first women's rights convention. This example has a natural pairing with the need for civics in education. Two historic days have evolved into a deeper consideration of individuals' mindsets, the implications for current lives, and the underlying connections to history. I introduced quotes, documents, the leading figures Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, and the first women's rights convention. Then, I posed a question: *What is a call to action?*

Taking on this very challenging topic is analogous to crossing the Grand Canyon: difficult and time consuming, but rewarding. The kids had to struggle with discomfort, silence, and anxiousness—all experienced within the safety of the preestablished rules and culture of the community circle. Struggle created fractures

within their common practices and mindsets—and opportunities for growth.

A month into contemplating the nature of a call to action, students' actions became more civic minded, and they began owning their learning environment. When a new girl joined our class, students decorated her locker with affirmations and welcoming messages. Community circles brought to light the importance of inviting partnerless people to join in groups to oppose awkward loneliness. Students find joy in kindness. The fermentation of the example preserved at the Women's Rights National Historical Park ignited the actions and empowerment of the students—and it all started in the community circle.

One pandemic fallout has been a decrease in communication between teachers, students, families, and communities. Community circles are one way to begin revitalizing our communication. Parents have been reporting positive developments in their children. These reports are heartening because children are *truly* educated when their actions are practiced independently. Academic gains are following. Students are recognizing the importance of inclusion, considering others' perspectives, and thinking about how to properly treat others. Students have self-guided purpose, and the soul and the mind are being fed equally.

–C. A.

Educators develop through a career of factors, some controllable and others not. I was not always happy in my career. I was confused in my first assignment, and I was scared when my student died. I am not uncommon or unique. A teaching career is an uphill marathon with some plateaus and some steep climbs. I am approaching the top of the hill. I am now number 12 on my school district's seniority list. But I still need to grow.

Sandy Koufax pitched for the Brooklyn and Los Angeles Dodgers for only 12 years, yet he was elected first ballot into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. In his final year, he retired with 27 wins and only 9 losses, recording one of the lowest earned run averages in the history of baseball: 1.73. He retired on top after pitching his best season.

Although I fear the day, I will retire. Like Koufax, it is my dream to have banner years in the end of my career. I have already begun the process. At the top of Bloom's taxonomy sits the synthesis of ideas, creativity, and self-reflection/evaluation. If a teacher at the beginning of a career requires guidance through mentorship, what structures should be in place at the end?

Those teachers who reach a silver anniversary, the 25-year

mark, most likely have seen full cycles of teaching methods rebranded like they are revelations. At that point, a teacher begins to wonder, "What is my purpose?"

I am happy because I was fortunate to teach in a school that values the creativity of teachers, and that is why I continue to be curious. If I could have one wish for veteran teachers, it would be that they are challenged the same way we are supposed to challenge children, by thinking critically.

Experienced teachers can synthesize many eras of teaching because they have seen changes firsthand. Let them give their knowledge, and if it bucks the system, trust them. Experienced teachers have earned the freedom to create. Let them. Veteran teachers can self-evaluate. Let them. Though the formalization of my yearly evaluation is still very prescriptive and diagnostic, I am fortunate to have the flexibility to create, and I feel value in my voice.

Twenty-seven years in, I am a happy teacher. I still want to go to work, and I do worry about retiring. It will have to happen at some point, but there is a lot of joy in knowing that I am on a trajectory to end my career feeling fulfilled. Every teacher deserves the same feeling. □

Following Shanker's Lead

Two Leaders of the Albert Shanker Institute Discuss Continuing Shanker's Fight for Public Education, the Labor Movement, and Democracy

From the 1960s until his death in 1997, Albert Shanker was a major force in expanding the labor movement, defending and improving public education, and fighting for all people to live freely in democracies. As president of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), he became known internationally as an education statesman devoted to making all public schools excellent and as a fierce labor leader determined to ensure that working people had a voice and dignity on the job.

The AFT established the Albert Shanker Institute in 1998 to carry on his intellectual tradition of being open to—and debating—any idea that might enrich the lives of working people and their families. In 2021, executive director Leo Casey handed the reins of the Albert Shanker Institute to Mary Cathryn D. Ricker, and that seemed like a perfect time to reflect on the institute's past and present. What follows is a conversation between Casey and Ricker on Albert Shanker's legacy and how the institute can ensure that public education, unionism, and democracy are mutually reinforcing. For an introduction to Shanker and the institute, see the sidebar on page 22.

Casey is now an assistant to AFT President Randi Weingarten and a member of the editorial board of *Dissent* magazine. Previously, he served as vice president for academic high schools for the United Federation of Teachers. He began his teaching career in 1984 at Clara Barton High School in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn and has written extensively on civics, education, unionism, and politics.* Ricker is a National Board–certified middle school English/language arts teacher who has served as Minnesota's commissioner of education, executive vice president of the AFT, and president of the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers (now the Saint Paul Federation of Educators). Prior to her leadership outside of the classroom, Ricker was a classroom teacher for 13 years in Minnesota, Washington state, and South Korea.

—EDITORS

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*To read an excerpt of Leo Casey's book, *The Teacher Insurgency: A Strategic and Organizing Perspective*, see "Organizing and Mobilizing" in the Spring 2021 issue of *American Educator*: aft.org/ae/spring2021/casey.

Reflecting, Pursuing Knowledge, and Building Coalitions: Al Shanker's Legacy

LEO CASEY: What did it mean to head up an institute with Albert Shanker's name on it? There are different views of that, and I have a very distinct perspective. There are folks who knew and worked with Shanker who view him as an authority. And so, what Shanker thought about a particular question became what we should think. I always found that view problematic. I'm reminded of Thomas Aquinas saying the weakest of all arguments is the argument from authority.

What being the head of the Albert Shanker Institute meant for me was striving to live up to the example of Shanker as a public intellectual. One of Shanker's most admirable traits as a public intellectual was that he never allowed himself to be hardened into a dogma. He was always rethinking questions, always open to the possibility that the way he had addressed something in the past was not the correct or best way. Perhaps the circumstances had changed, or his own thinking changed.

Right before he passed away, an article[†] based on an in-depth interview of Shanker was published in *New York Teacher*; the interviewer asked if there was anything he regretted or would do differently now. Shanker said he had changed his mind about communists as teachers. He had argued that communists should not be allowed to teach because they adhere to a dogmatic ideology and are not open-minded. Later in life, he realized that there are many causes of being closed-minded—including many well-respected religions. He thought that his earlier concept of dogmatic thinking should not be relevant. Instead, teachers should be judged by what they do in the classroom.

This example stuck with me because it speaks to who Shanker was. He was always

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†To read the article, go to go.aft.org/r3b.

willing to rethink issues. Today, he would not want us to stick with his positions on topics. If he were alive, his thinking would continue to change—and so should ours.

Perhaps even more importantly, Shanker shared his new questions and ideas openly. He was a perfect example of a public intellectual who is publicly engaged and always willing to rethink questions and see new possibilities.

MARY CATHRYN D. RICKER: I am the first executive director who didn't know Al Shanker personally and didn't have the chance to interact with him. The Shanker I know is through the biography by Richard Kahlenberg,[†] the reflective essays in *American Educator*,[§] and the stories shared by those who did know Shanker. I completely agree that he would never stay static in his opinions, and neither should we.

What I have gleaned is that Shanker had a thirst for knowledge. He was a voracious reader; he loved discussions and debates. His open-minded pursuit of knowledge is what brought peer assistance and review[**] to the national union. I've heard about executive council meetings in which Shanker brought Dal Lawrence, the head of the Toledo Federation of Teachers, which pioneered peer assistance and review, to talk about its benefits. They both practically had shoes thrown at them at first. But through discussion and debate, many local leaders came around. By 2005, when I became president of the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers, I inherited an AFT that invited me to learn more about peer assistance and review, and then supported me to negotiate it in my local's practice. That arc tells me about the spirit that we inherit at the institute that bears his name.

It is not lost on me that Shanker envisioned the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. And now, an institute bearing his name is being led by a National Board–certified teacher. As I have encouraged others to pursue board certification, I've talked about the meaning of a reflective practitioner. Shanker was the consummate reflective practitioner. He looked for coun-

terarguments. He wanted people to poke holes in his ideas in order to make those ideas stronger.

So, while we remain committed to Shanker's three major priorities—public education, the labor movement, and democracy—we also must be committed to reflection. When we evolve our thinking, we are honoring Al Shanker.

LEO: Those three themes of public education, unionism, and democracy are central to our Shanker Institute mission. But how we promote them and what they look like differ in different contexts. Before I came to the institute, our democracy work was international. We supported people like Han Dongfang, the leader of the independent union movement in China and an institute board member, to help Chinese workers organize. But now, we have a situation in which American democracy itself hangs in the balance, so our democracy work made a major shift to focus on our domestic challenges.

In addition to our three priorities, a key value is how we pursue those priorities. The institute has a reputation for inviting in people who disagree with us. There is a whole range of views within the union movement, especially about the decline of membership over the last 50 years, and there is something to be gained by debate. Holding conferences where we invite people from all those views to openly debate is a legacy of Shanker as a public intellectual. We value the way debate makes ideas sharper. Even when we do not come to agreement, there is something of value that comes from the debate—you learn from it and incorporate it into your strategies going forward.

MARY CATHRYN: As part of Shanker's ongoing reflection and desire to learn, he was constantly scanning the horizon, looking for ideas to amplify. I see continuing that practice as our responsibility. The institute is already working with, and striving to find and elevate, some of the best labor leaders in the country. Randi Weingarten, the AFT's president and an institute board member, is a perfect example of someone who also scans the horizon for the most promising practices.

Tying these threads together is another critical practice that started with Shanker and remains a priority for the institute. We

don't just have three priorities; we ask how public education, unionism, and democracy strengthen each other.

In 2007, while I was president of the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers, I had the opportunity to go on a study trip to Yemen with the institute. The immediate goal was to help our Yemeni union colleagues practice democracy in their workplace so they could familiarize themselves with what it takes for democracy to function. And the larger goal was for them to learn what to expect of their government in practicing democracy. It exemplified the intersection of education, unionism, and democracy.

Today, as we face attacks on our democracy, the labor movement, and public education, our instinct is to figure out how all three can reinforce each other. We are asking: How do we reinvent and reinvigorate our unions and our labor movement to be a vehicle for strengthening our democracy? How do we defend our democracy to strengthen our public schools? How do we recommit to our public schools and make them an even stronger foundation for our democracy?

> When we evolve our thinking, we are honoring Al Shanker.

LEO: These intersections are important, and so is being strategic in building coalitions around them. Relationships are important, especially for making progress on political issues. Shanker was a big ideas man, but he was notoriously ill at ease in social settings. Still, he forged real relationships—often not with the usual suspects. He reached out to people who would not have been considered normal allies for a teachers' union. That's important. Shanker knew that he needed to put together the strongest possible coalition to address issues. He would work with people in powerful positions on the issues where they could agree, and openly disagree on other issues. Shanker had many partnerships with people who believed in public educa-

tion yet were never won over on unionism. This ability to build coalitions is an important part of Shanker's legacy.

Soft Power: The Institute's Distinct Contribution

LEO: As teachers and former AFT leaders, we are in unique positions to ask what's distinctive about the institute within the AFT constellation. I have a couple of thoughts. One is that I have always thought of the institute as the AFT's institution of soft power. Political scientists distinguish between hard power, such as military might, and soft power, like diplomacy, treaties, and culture and ideas. Within the AFT, our equivalents of hard power are organizing and political actions. The institute cultivates soft power by trying to impact national and regional policy debates, mainly through our distinct union voice.

Albert Shanker: A Champion for Working People and Their Children

Albert Shanker, who led the American Federation of Teachers from 1974 until his death in 1997, was born on Manhattan's Lower East Side in 1928. His parents were Russian Jewish immigrants. While his father delivered newspapers from a pushcart, his mother—who worked in a sweatshop as a sewing machine operator—taught Shanker a deep appreciation of trade unionism and a love of spirited debate. Although he didn't speak a word of English when he entered first grade, Shanker flourished in New York City's public school system. He headed the Stuyvesant High School debating team and graduated with honors from the University of Illinois, but then ran out of funds just short of completing a PhD in philosophy at Columbia University. Having taken what he described as a "lousy job" as a per-diem substitute teacher at PS 179 in East Harlem, he launched a career as an educator and trade union leader. As president of the American Federation of Teachers, he became known internationally as a strong and courageous advocate for labor—as well as an "iconoclastic thinker," "champion of children," and "educational statesman."

As a child, Shanker encountered vicious antisemitism in his neighborhood, but also learned the value of public education for forming civic identity, expanding intellectual horizons, and increasing economic opportunity. Once he began teaching in New York City's public schools, he was outraged at working conditions. What struck him most was the basic unfairness to teachers—the low pay, lack of dignity, and lack of voice. He helped form the United Federation of Teachers (AFT Local 2) in 1960 and became its president in 1964.

With Shanker's dogged efforts at unionizing teachers, his ability to lead his members—who, by the end of the 1960s, included paraprofessionals—and his skills at negotiating with city officials, the United Federation of Teachers became the country's and the world's largest local union. Nationally, his efforts brought about the rapid transformation of education into the most organized sector in the country.

Shanker clearly saw the increasing dangers to both public education and the labor movement as a conservative political movement swept America, particularly with Ronald Reagan's election as president in 1980. Shanker advocated for trailblazing reforms and challenged his union's members. He urged a restructuring of the AFT into a broader union of professionals and argued for expanded organizing efforts into the fields of nursing, public service, higher education, and preschool. He asked all these constituencies to reshape their union's priorities to make it crystal clear that serving members meant serving students, patients, clients, and the public too. He encouraged experiments in practices previously dismissed out of hand (such as differential pay, charter schools, and peer review), often urging new policies within a collective bargaining framework, but also at the state and federal levels.

Shanker also fought to promote democracy at home and abroad. In foreign policy, he supported and defended labor's democratic internationalism—including its opposition to communism on the left and authoritarianism on the right—based on the principles of freedom of association and workers' right to organize. Ultimately, Shanker became the labor leader to contend with in virtually every area of public policy.

To learn more about Albert Shanker, read "The Agenda That Saved Public Education" by Richard D. Kahlenberg in the Fall 2007 issue of American Educator*: go.aft.org/f93. The article was excerpted from Kahlenberg's excellent biography of Shanker,* Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy.

–Staff of the Albert Shanker Institute

The Albert Shanker Institute, endowed by the American Federation of Teachers and named in honor of its late president, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to three themes: excellence in public education, unions as advocates for quality, and freedom of association in the public life of democracies. With an independent board of directors composed of educators, business representatives, labor leaders, academics, and public policy analysts, its mission is to generate ideas, foster candid exchanges, and promote constructive policy proposals related to these issues.

Current focus areas include:

- Teacher time use and a new context for teaching
- Equity and adequacy in school finance
- The characteristics of successful literacy systems
- Educating for democratic citizenship
- Working for the common good

To learn about the institute's events and resources, including its annual conversation series, blog, and original research, visit shankerinstitute.org.

When I first came to the institute in 2012, it was the height of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, both of which focused heavily on high-stakes testing and accountability. What struck me about the elite discourse on education in Washington, DC, was a complete absence of teacher voice. Since I had the institute platform, I was determined that there would be at least one teacher interjecting ideas and intervening in policy discussions.

My second thought about the institute's place in the AFT is that we have the luxury of not having to fight immediate battles. Much of the AFT is always focused on very immediate, critical, sometimes even existential battles. The institute can devote more energy to long-term thinking and strategizing. We do this with a very small staff and, in my opinion, punch far above our weight.

MARY CATHRYN: I agree. It is unique in the labor movement to have a think tank that can step out of the moment. And I see another aspect of the institute that is distinctive: we don't just follow the research; we conduct our own original research and set new agendas. The AFT has grown to 1.7 million members; in addition to our members working in schools and colleges, we represent healthcare professionals and public employees. In fact, the AFT is the nation's second-largest nurses' union.

And so, building on our institute's commitment to public education, the labor movement, and democracy, we now have broader responsibilities and should be looking for opportunities to support these members' core issues. Consider healthcare during this pandemic. Could the institute's capacity to conduct research and build coalitions be harnessed to help meet our healthcare members' needs? And consider public employees as we face attacks on voting rights and election integrity; these workers are the daily defenders of democracy. What could the institute be doing to support the workers who protect voters and polling places? These are the types of questions we need to ask as we seek new opportunities to develop and wield our soft power.

LEO: How you do this long-term thinking and strategic planning is important; there's no shortage of issues that need to be addressed, but we have a finite pool of human resources. It's critical to be able to identify the points of leverage where our intervention can have maximum effect.

The best example from my time at the institute was our research on teachers of color. Policymakers had a general sense that the teaching profession was not reflective of the student body, but the problem had not been documented in a way that would force people to address the issue. The institute undertook a study* of nine of the largest school districts in the United States—but it was not easy because they did not want to turn over their data. We had to bring in lawyers to file requests according to the states' various public information laws.

We persisted, and the resulting report showed that the lack of teacher diversity was far more severe than anyone thought. That was particularly true for African American teachers. Not only were their numbers far behind the numbers of African American students, but they were declining in these major cities. Once we laid that foundation, many other people and organizations waded into the issue, conducting further research and publishing reports. By the end of the Obama administration, the US Department of Education was taking on the issue.

This line of research no doubt would have been undertaken eventually by some other group, but it would not have happened as quickly or thoroughly without the institute's foundational research. Today, the need to recruit and retain more teachers of color, especially African American teachers, is widely discussed. Many initiatives are examining teacher preparation and early career supports to address the problem.

To me, both the institute's research on this issue and its strategic approach are important—and the approach is especially so because it can be applied across issues. For the institute, a key question is: Can we make a difference? Many issues are important, but for us to take one on, we need to devise an intervention that no one else is doing that could make a difference.

Here's another example. With the focus on high-stakes testing and teachers' "value added," teachers were being reduced to scores. In addition to pointing out the many problems with high stakes for students and teachers and the many ways in which the resulting scores are questionable at best, we intentionally started shifting the

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*To read the study, visit go.aft.org/j1i.

debate to the social side of education. There's a strong body of research on the importance of school culture and quality relationships—both among educators and among educators and students. This was well known, but it was being ignored in the fervor over accountability. So again, the key here is that our small institute found a point of leverage in which we could intervene in a way no one else was to change the terms of the debate.

For the institute, a key question is: Can we make a difference?

MARY CATHRYN: One of the most exciting opportunities for me, as I transition into this role, is scanning the horizon to see how the institute can continue to build on your work—how our resources can continue to do the greatest good. For example, what is the next natural growth from the teacher diversity report? We remain firmly committed to diversifying the teaching profession because that is what our students deserve and because we know greater diversity will strengthen our public schools.

When I was commissioner of education in Minnesota, I spent time listening to aspiring and experienced teachers and administrators. The stress they are experi-

By listening closely to our members, we can help them shine lights on the things that need to be improved.

encing has become overwhelming. The teaching profession is breaking; turnover is high, substitutes are hard to find, and enrollment in teacher preparation programs is declining. And all of that was true before the pandemic.

We need to rebuild this profession—and we're under no obligation to rebuild it the way we found it.

If we are to create a profession that welcomes a more diverse teaching force, we have to offer the supports teachers and students need. After all, teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions. The teacher diversity study and subsequent work by the institute shows that we should reimagine the profession. We must create a safe and welcoming profession for a diverse, high-quality workforce that knows how to meet the needs of our diverse students.

Another area where I would like to build on the progress you and the team made is defending the public square and public discourse. School boards have been in the headlines for months with far too many angry exchanges about masks, vaccines, and other COVID-19 mitigation strategies. Some school board members have been threatened and have quit, and in some places momentum is growing for board members to be appointed instead of elected.

People might not expect an institute founded by a teachers' union to be a defender of elected school boards—but this is a critical area where public education and democracy intersect. The opportunity for a community to elect the leaders who will shape the public education of their children is threatened right now. This is a critical fight to make sure we don't cede the public square anywhere.

The divisive experiences in school board meetings across the country, particularly in the lead-up to the midterm elections, is a quintessential example of both that intersection of issues we talked about earlier and the opportunity to engage in strategic coalition-building. The first thing the Shanker Institute did was research the common points of friction in these episodes and look to see what current literature says. Now we have begun discussing what that intervention is that can make a difference. Bringing people together in conferences or conversations, which the institute has been doing for decades, is both a strength of the institute and what this fraught time needs. Retreating from conversation about the rancor in school boards cedes that public space. Our priority will be to find the common ground among all of us who believe democratically elected school boards matter—even when we are on opposite sides of a debated issue—and promote this intersection of our democracy, our public schools, and our communities.

Leo, I also have to say that launching the civics and democracy fellowships, the Educating for Democratic Citizenship project, alongside you during the transition of our roles was a privilege. Thank you for your work the last two years to imagine this initiative in which accomplished teachers serve as fellows writing strong K–12 inquiry-based civics and democracy lessons to be housed on Share My Lesson. And thank you for raising funds so that those teachers could be compensated. As a teacher leader, you saw how No Child Left Behind ravaged social studies lessons, particularly at the elementary level. As a result, students have been coming into middle school without the background knowledge they need to thrive academically. Teachers have been working to reinvigorate social studies, but despite the existence of K–12 state standards, one of the barriers has been high-quality lesson ideas. I am looking forward to sharing the lessons these accomplished teachers are creating and raising more funds to continue this work after this school year.

Cultivating Opportunities: The Institute's Future

LEO: I can't imagine a better successor leading the institute. You are an educational professional who started from excellence in the classroom. I would have loved to be in your class as a student, and I would have loved to observe and collaborate with you as a teacher. Your experience—as a National Board–certified teacher, a local union leader, a national union leader, and a state commissioner of education—gives you moral authority and credibility.

MARY CATHRYN: That is incredibly kind; thank you so much. Every day, as I begin to fill up my bookshelves and look at the day's work ahead, I have a responsibility to continue to build. I have the honor of standing on the shoulders of giants, and I am gladly taking up your commitment to centering the voices of teachers and learners.

In the last 50 years, we have learned a lot about teaching and learning, but we keep trying to apply what we have learned to a 1970's school day. As Randi said last May, we need a renaissance in public education, including public colleges and universities. I look forward to convening diverse groups so that we can figure out the institute's leverage points for seeding that renaissance. To begin with, we get to shine lights on those things that need changing.

And we get to do the same for public employees and healthcare professionals. By listening very closely to those members, we can help them shine lights on the things that need to be improved. One of my goals is for AFT members to be able to say, "This is what the institute does for me while I'm teaching, or taking care of patients, or defending democracy." This is an incredible opportunity and a very serious obligation. □

Who Controls Online Courses?

How For-Profit Companies Are Harming Public Higher Education

By Stephanie Hall

Between 2003 and 2016, the percentage of undergraduates taking at least one course online nearly tripled, increasing from 15.6 to 43.1.[1] Initially, that enrollment was concentrated in the proprietary, or for-profit, higher education sector. In response, and to make up for declining numbers of "traditional" college students and the resulting revenue shortfalls, some public colleges and universities formed arrangements with for-profit education companies.*

While these arrangements take many forms, here's an example: in 2017, without faculty input or approval, Indiana's Purdue University acquired for-profit online giant Kaplan University, creating one of the largest online providers in the country.[3] The arrangement changed Kaplan's name to Purdue University Global and locked the newly formed institution into a long-term service agreement with Kaplan's for-profit holding company. The institution birthed from the deal, Purdue Global, has been a captive client of its for-profit service provider since day one and has been prevented from acting in the best interest of its students.[4] It relies on Kaplan's holding company to function, and Kaplan retains veto rights over academic and admissions changes proposed by Purdue Global. If Purdue Global wants to continue existing, it must continue to rely on Kaplan's services. Further, in Purdue's contract with Kaplan, Purdue agreed to continue Kaplan's tradition of overspending on marketing and recruiting and overcharging students in tuition and fees.

Other similar arrangements have captured the media's attention in the past two years.[5] In 2020, the University of Arizona announced that it would acquire the notorious for-profit giant Ashford University. Ashford is known to student and consumer advocates because of its dismal track record: Ashford spends an abysmal $0.19 on instruction for every tuition dollar it collects.[6] (In contrast, the median for-profit institution spends $0.38, the median private nonprofit institution spends $0.59, and the median public institution spends $1.29 on instruction for every dollar collected in tuition.[7]) Ashford's students have suffered from the lack of investment in their success—just 24 percent

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*Traditional undergraduate college students are often thought of as those under the age of 25 who enter college immediately following high school and attend full time, while nontraditional students are those whose prior experiences, opportunities, and choices may diverge from that.[2]

return after their first year and the graduation rate is only 22 percent.[8] In 2021, Ashford's accreditor, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, sent the school an action letter demanding it revise and clarify its plans for academic improvement.[9] Ashford has also faced a series of lawsuits and investigations for violating several states' consumer protection laws and has been sued for fraud by the state of California.[10] As yet, it is unclear how or if the University of Arizona plans to clean up Ashford's operations, or if it is simply sticking its name onto a subpar product and using the revenue to subsidize other parts of the system's operations.

> In many respects, colleges and universities in public-private partnership arrangements have shifted control of a public good to private, for-profit companies.

These high-profile arrangements operate in much the same way as lesser-known—but more common—partnerships between many of the nation's oldest, most respected colleges and universities and for-profit, third-party providers. Private education companies, often referred to as online program managers (OPMs), manage hundreds of online degree programs for public colleges and universities, though the public—including the students and faculty in the programs—is too often unaware. Many flagship state universities have or have had contracts with OPMs (including Arizona State, Kent State, Louisiana State, the University of Florida, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), though colleges and universities of all sizes and missions engage in this form of academic outsourcing.[11]

OPMs offer services from student recruitment to video production to instructional design. Despite these college-OPM arrangements operating in the background, they can be just as big of a liability as Purdue's deal with Kaplan and Arizona's arrangement with Ashford. Schools that contract OPMs for a comprehensive set of services can find themselves stuck in never-ending arrangements that serve neither students nor their bottom line, for a variety of reasons.

The arrangements behind the scenes of many online degree programs are billed as public-private partnerships, a concept that has long been the darling of liberal and neoliberal education reformers. These partnerships are promoted with and hinge on the idea that the private sector can innovate and operate more efficiently, so pairing that potential with a public good enhances outcomes for the public. Public-private partnerships can be found up and down the education sector and throughout the typical campus, where they are relied on for housing, dining, maintenance, and parking services. In reality, such partnership billing is meant to sugarcoat what is really happening: outsourcing. In many respects, colleges and universities in these arrangements have outsourced their core functions and shifted control of a public good into the hands of private, for-profit companies.

The Perfect Storm: Privatizing Public Higher Education

Outsourced academic programs are really privatized programs. Privatization supplants the public purpose with private gain, which further erodes the structure of public colleges and universities. Multiple factors have contributed to the perceived need to outsource core functions.

The most important is that public institutions are starved for funds. After the Great Recession,[12] public colleges and universities never truly recovered to their pre-2008 levels of public support and subsidy: nationally, state and local funding for public higher education's operating expenses in fiscal year 2020 was 6 percent below the 2008 funding level and 14.6 percent below the 2001 funding level.[13] To add insult to injury, the burden of insufficient funding is not equitably distributed. Community colleges and historically Black colleges and universities have always had some of the lowest levels of per-student support and have therefore been made to do more with less.[14]

Credentialism is another factor in the perfect storm that has led colleges and universities to outsource programs. Credentialism is the way a degree or certificate signals job worthiness, rather than actual skill level, and it increases demand for credentials as people seek better jobs and/or more security against layoffs.[15]

Closely related to this drive for credentials are inflation plus stagnant wages.* Our salaries provide us less than they did 10 and 20 years ago;[16] job seekers can infer that a higher credential might get them a higher paying job, which also drives up demand for higher education programs.

At the same time, student loan debt has remained a steady, accessible form of credit. For-profit colleges have a long history of preying on those most in need of credentials, particularly African Americans:

> Government-backed student loans were opened up to students at for-profit colleges in 1972 and quickly became integral to these schools' business models. For-profit schools began to market themselves to students of color specifically by helping them navigate the federal student loan system.... For-profit schools' ability to attract students was given a significant boost by the 2008 recession, when young people sought refuge from a weak labor market in degree programs.... Greater demand for higher education is typical during a recession, but recent research argues that this trend was exacerbated in 2008 by a monopsonized labor market (i.e., a labor market dominated

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*To understand why wages have been stagnant and what we can do about it, see "Moral Policy = Good Economics: Lifting Up Poor and Working-Class People—and Our Whole Economy" in the Fall 2021 issue of *American Educator*: aft.org/ae/fall2021/barber_barnes_bivens_faries_lee_theoharis.

by too small a number of employers), in which employers could demand more credentials for the same jobs. This was particularly harmful for students of color, from whom employers *already* demanded higher credentials.[17]

Squeezed by inadequate government funding and seeking to capitalize on this demand, public colleges and universities have responded by outsourcing their core functions in hopes of quickly drawing in new students. Far too many students have no idea a private company is behind the ads they see, the recruitment calls they receive, and the management of the program they eventually enroll in. The profit-oriented ethos of these OPMs has eroded the democratic ideal of public higher education as a key institution contributing to our ability to self-govern.[18]

## Grad School Cash Cows: Creating the Outsourced University

In 2019, over half of all graduate degrees earned were concentrated in three fields: business, education, and health. Universities have enjoyed robust demand for these degrees thanks to a convergence of factors, including that educators and health professionals can earn a salary increase and/or gain access to specialized roles with increased training. The number of graduate health professions degrees conferred between 2009 and 2019 nearly doubled (from 69,100 to over 131,600), while the number of graduate education degrees granted during that period dropped from its peak of over 180,000 to holding steady near 150,000 per year.[19]

Graduate schools of education and health are an essential part of the public university ecosystem. Even so, thanks to economic pressures, public universities rely on full-paying graduate students as a source of revenue. While this cash-cow situation emerged on public university campuses, for-profit colleges also cashed in by marketing online graduate degrees on a national scale.

Such cash-cow programs are not necessarily low in value for students. Graduate programs are worthwhile to educators and health professionals even beyond potential pay increases and promotions. Graduate-level training is valuable for the professional networking opportunities and for the application of higher-order, research-based practices in the field. However, there has been a risk of that value decreasing ever since the nation's public colleges realized they could fatten their cash cows by competing with for-profit, online mega-universities.

Between 2003 and 2019, the percentage of graduate students in public universities earning their degrees online grew from 4.8 to 27.[20] For public universities, one goal has been to attract students who might otherwise go to the for-profit behemoth University of Phoenix. At its peak in 2010, the University of Phoenix enrolled nearly half a million students. According to some University of Phoenix insiders, its growth came at the cost of quality control measures that had been in place a decade prior.[21] By the time public and nonprofit colleges and universities entered the online degree game, the University of Phoenix brand was tarnished because of high withdrawal rates, low graduation rates, and high student debt.[22] For recognizable public universities, attracting students away from the scandal-plagued for-profit college sector is not difficult; the challenge comes with legitimately offering an experience that is of higher quality and value than one would find at schools like the University of Phoenix.

OPMs have been experiencing a prolonged boon thanks to enrollment- and revenue-anxious institutions that feel the need to quickly create online programs. Some of the anxiety is justified. Pressure to compete online can come from governing boards and state legislators who want their institutions seen as national leaders in an increasingly crowded "global U" arena. This pressure also comes from a basic need to generate revenue because of the low levels of public funding.
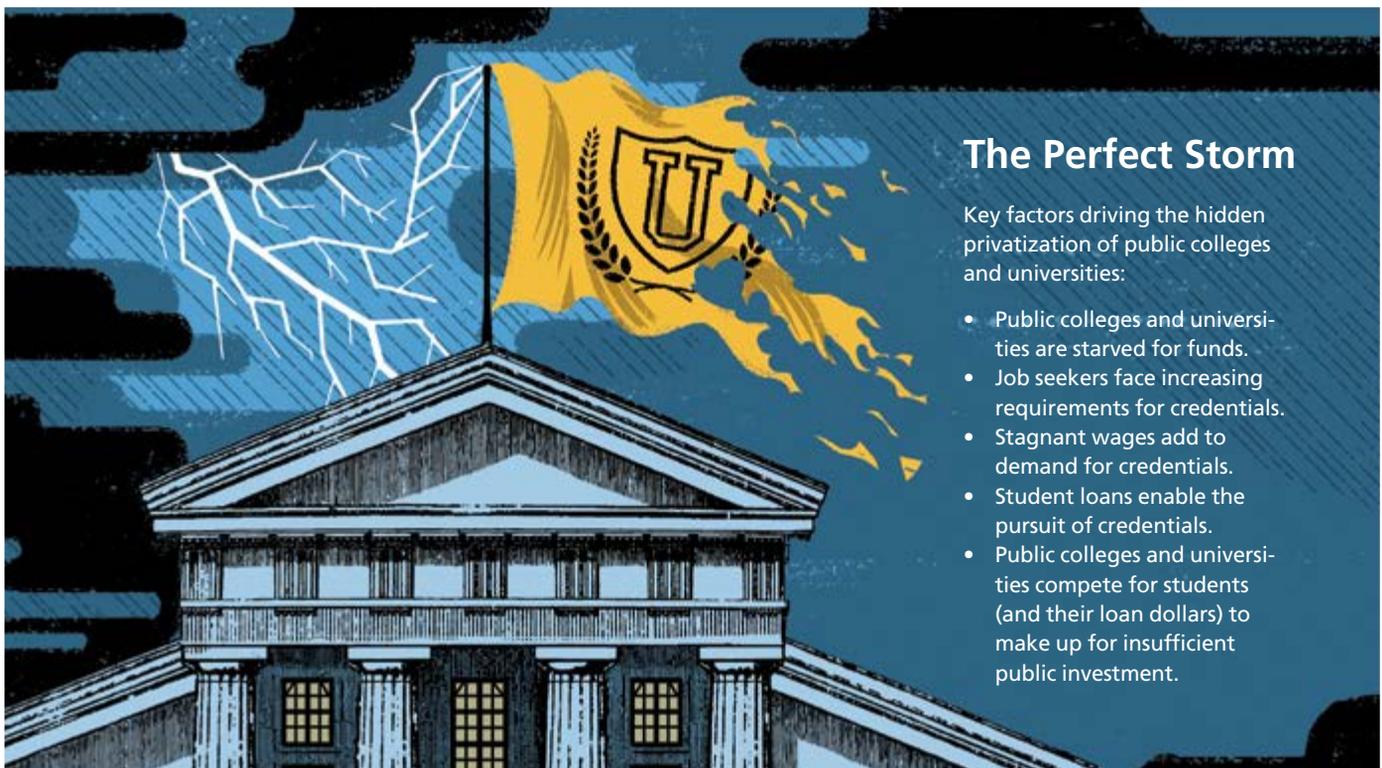
The Perfect Storm

Key factors driving the hidden privatization of public colleges and universities:

- Public colleges and universities are starved for funds.
- Job seekers face increasing requirements for credentials.
- Stagnant wages add to demand for credentials.
- Student loans enable the pursuit of credentials.
- Public colleges and universities compete for students (and their loan dollars) to make up for insufficient public investment.

Steady demand in certain fields, coupled with enrollment and revenue shortfalls in other fields, has added to the perfect storm for the proliferation of online and outsourced graduate degrees. Because graduate education and health degrees have long been a safe bet, it is no surprise that when public universities began offering online degrees, they started with those fields. Many of the contracts signed by public universities to initiate partnerships with OPMs began with one, two, or a handful of education or nursing programs and ballooned from there.[23]

When OPMs entered the scene as enablers, they offered to front the costs and risks associated with launching online programs in exchange for a substantial cut of the tuition revenue (often around 50 percent and sometimes up to 80 percent).[24] Many universities are still locked into the terms of those early "partnership" agreements—some dating back over a decade—because OPMs could justify long terms and difficult exit clauses by the amount of risk they were taking on. Resources must be devoted to designing and launching an online program, but if students don't fill the virtual classrooms, the upfront investments are lost. OPMs purport to take on that risk by facilitating the creation and marketing of, and recruitment to fill seats in, online courses.

While there are very real risks on the OPM side, they diminish as the partnership matures and as the OPM takes on more partners. This is because OPMs enjoy efficiencies across the services they offer and the clients they serve. OPMs can find and exploit efficiencies in two key directions: by managing the same program across multiple institutions and by managing multiple programs for single institutions. In the case of the former, the OPM takes on less risk with each duplicate program it manages; the necessary details for the curriculum development and instructional design stages, for example, are largely replicated across campuses. In the case of an OPM managing multiple programs for a single institution, the labor involved with branding, marketing, and recruitment work will be lighter with each program added to the scope of an OPM-university contract.

An OPM called Academic Partnerships manages or has managed graduate education programs for public universities including Eastern Michigan University, Louisiana State University Shreveport, and the University of West Florida. According to their contracts, Academic Partnerships has a hand in curriculum development, program sequencing, instructional design, program marketing, and student recruitment.[25] So while the brand under which degrees in programs like educational leadership are offered may be different, the content and marketing strategies happening behind the scenes are not.

In the early days of online program enablement, OPMs did take on quite a lot of upfront risk. But today, there is no reason for a public university to lock itself into a long-term contract that outsources its core functions to a for-profit provider. Given the current balance of risks and efficiencies, universities are in a much more powerful negotiating position for securing shorter contracts with easier exit clauses. Exercising that power increases the value of the partnership for students, faculty, and the public at large.

The Oversight Triad: Playing Catch-Up

Among those colleges and universities in which the perfect storm holds true, using an OPM to make up for revenue shortfalls is like expecting an umbrella to keep you dry while walking through a hurricane. Public and nonprofit colleges and universities should be looking to more effective and sustainable responses to the storm they find themselves in. That may mean assessing what the local community and economy need and exploring how to bring education to any nearby communities in education deserts using internal expertise and community input. To realize the true democratic ideal of public higher education, its programs should serve more than its bottom line. Under the OPM status quo, programs currently serve the bottom lines of third-party companies first, the college or university second, and the students third, if at all.

Graduate Students' Online Courses

SOURCE: TABLE CREATED USING NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS DATA; SEE ENDNOTE 20.

In theory, higher education is regulated by a triad of oversight consisting of the federal government, states, and accrediting agencies. Despite this, online—and especially outsourced—degrees are largely unregulated. This is the case for a number of reasons, and in the online graduate program marketplace, a major factor is a decade-old loophole.

Colleges and universities are prohibited from paying employees or contractors who recruit students for programs per head they successfully enroll. This is an important ban that protects prospective students from pressurized sales tactics that masquerade as student recruitment. If recruiters can be paid on a commission basis, they have an incentive to do whatever it takes to secure students' enrollment. In 2011, however, the US Department of Education created an exception to this ban, allowing colleges to pay contractors who provide a bundle of services, including student recruitment, on a tuition-sharing basis.[26] The department justified the loophole on at least two bases. One, that the third party would remain independent from the institution and wield no influence over decision making—and thus would not be prone to the same abuses that had been previously documented within the for-profit college sector. Two, that public and private nonprofit colleges and universities needed an exception to the ban on incentive compensation payments in order to offer online programs and provide an alternative to students who would otherwise look to the for-profit online giants.[27]

Unfortunately, this ushered in the growth of a massive industry of for-profit providers that operates behind the scenes of hundreds of degree programs and is reliant on public funding.[28] Worse, many OPMs and their college and university partners have ignored the guidance that provides the exception in the first place. Under some agreements, OPMs have decision-making power over enrollment, tuition pricing, budgeting, and curricular matters.[29] For example, a public university in Texas relies on an OPM to manage dozens of online programs; as part of the agreement, a steering committee made up of equal parts university and OPM representatives meets regularly to discuss items like admission policies and how policy changes impact the revenue the programs bring in.[30]

Other parts of the oversight triad that could step in to minimize potential harm to students have yet to do so effectively. Accreditors are still getting their bearings when it comes to understanding the OPM industry and how they should review arrangements between their member institutions and the private companies.[31] Unfortunately, while they take time to catch up, some very problematic arrangements have formed, showing the extent to which public colleges and universities can truly be diluted by their "partners" from the private sector. For example, Grand Canyon University has an OPM-style service contract with its for-profit counterpart, Grand Canyon Education.[32] The two Grand Canyon organizations share a CEO, and the nonprofit university is a completely captive client, locked into an infinite contract with the for-profit company. This captivity was created by design, though many other colleges and universities are approaching a similar level of capture by their OPMs, despite arriving there from a different starting point.[33]

OPMs now hold power over things like tuition pricing, enrollment targets, and program governance at many public institutions. At those where OPMs have become the most embedded, to pull the plug on them would threaten the viability of the institution itself. When private power outweighs public power, it is not a partnership at all.

Recentering the Public in Public-Private Partnerships

As they are currently operating, many outsourcing arrangements between public colleges and universities and for-profit OPMs are eroding the democratic ideal of public higher education. Public institutions are at risk, and so are many of the students bringing the necessary tuition dollars. Faculty and the campus community can and should step in to reclaim the public's role and the public's benefit in these so-called partnerships.

> Under the status quo, programs currently serve the bottom lines of third-party customers first, the college or university second, and the students third, if at all.

In 2019, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) distributed a toolkit to assist its chapters in scrutinizing arrangements that privatize the online classroom.[34] The guide was compiled based on lessons learned by AAUP chapters that had encountered problematic features in their universities' OPM contracts, as well as from 2017 and 2019 analyses of arrangements from around the country by my colleagues and me at The Century Foundation.

The AAUP toolkit advises faculty on how to evaluate proposed or existing agreements and advocate for better ones. The toolkit addresses issues central to AAUP members and their students, including intellectual property, consumer protection, contract payment and termination, and program governance. Although each is described below, the AAUP's guidance is best taken as a package deal.

Intellectual Property

College and university arrangements with OPMs can include fine print that erodes or negates faculty control over the instructional materials they have created. The AAUP recommends that faculty groups scrutinize their institution's intellectual property (IP) policy and advocate for stronger policies. To keep pace with the move to online education, it's critical to retain faculty, college, or university ownership over IP if courses are offered online. Faculty

should ensure that IP rights clarify ownership of course materials that are produced for online course use.

The 2012 contract between Rutgers University and Pearson's OPM provides a positive example of IP rights being clearly spelled out.[35] It not only defines IP but also gives examples of each of three types of IP that could result from the arrangement: Pearson IP, Rutgers IP, and jointly owned "Combined Work." Importantly, the Rutgers IP example clearly states that Rutgers retains its IP even when Pearson has edited the work:

> Rutgers IP example – Rutgers' written material and media assets, including but not limited to images, graphs, interactive tutorials, podcasts, video lectures, simulations and animations. For purposes of clarity, content that is originated by a Rutgers professor which Pearson then edits, adapts, and/or formats such as Pearson recording a video lecture of a Rutgers professor or creating new iterations of a problem set or exam will be considered Rutgers IP.[36]

Consumer Protection

When evaluating agreements between their institutions and potential contractors, faculty should inquire what the marketing, recruiting, and enrollment processes will entail. Faculty should also be aware of whether or not their institution is paying an OPM on a tuition-sharing basis. Tuition sharing introduces an incentive for the OPM to engage in high-pressure recruiting and to emphasize marketing and outreach over other services promised in the contract. If such payment terms cannot or will not be avoided, faculty should advocate for close and constant control over marketing and recruiting activities. Contracts that delegate marketing to the contractor, but that do not include details on how, when, and who from the college or university will review marketing plans, advertising content, or recruitment scripts, are dangerous for students and for an institution's reputation.

Once primarily the domain of for-profit colleges, restrictive enrollment contracts are now used by some public and nonprofit programs that are managed by OPMs.[37] The worst enrollment contracts contain disturbing fine print that prevents students from exercising their rights if things go wrong. This is accomplished through so-called mandatory arbitration, go-it-alone, and gag clauses that bar students from pursuing damages in court, from joining class-action lawsuits, or from speaking about the complaint-resolution process. These restrictions are now appearing in the terms and conditions that apply to public and nonprofit college and university programs, especially in cases where institutions are paying an OPM to manage noncredit programs like coding bootcamps.[38] Some such details are often found in the OPM contract, but usually there are separate terms and conditions the admitted students submit to, and it is equally important for faculty to be aware of these, since they are almost always developed by the third party.

Contract Payment and Termination

The most important elements of an outsourcing agreement are the payment terms and the conditions on which the contract can or will end. The payment terms establish the incentives of each party in the arrangement, and the most important element to look out for is tuition sharing. Institutions that pay contractors a percentage of revenue generated from the managed program(s) while also relying on those contractors to recruit students for admission create a scenario where the contractors will be incentivized to maximize enrollment and inclined to cut corners on other services. Likewise, the amount of revenue that is shared is important to consider. Faculty should compare the cost of contracting for discrete services with the eventual cost of a comprehensive OPM contract and ask themselves whether the percentage of tuition shared makes sense. Will the amount the college or university pays to the contractor prevent it from fully supporting faculty or otherwise ensuring online programs are on par with on-campus programs?

It is equally important that fair contract termination rights are included. The public institution must be able to get out of the contract with a reasonable amount of notice given and liability expected. Under no circumstances should a contract include automatic renewal clauses or restrictions on actions the institution can take upon termination.

Program Governance

An alarming finding of The Century Foundation's analysis of contracts has been the prevalence of new program governance bodies formed via OPM agreements. These are sometimes referred to as steering committees, and they almost always provide equal parts and voting rights to the college or university and the OPM. Contracts reveal that some committees take up issues such as course offerings, class start dates, budgeting, tuition pricing, and enrollment targets. Allowing the OPM into discussions and decision making on any of these elements crosses a clear line into illegal territory. According to federal guidance, it is acceptable for a college or university to pay a contractor on a tuition-sharing basis only if the two parties are independent of each other—but steering committees eliminate that independence. While both parties stand to gain or lose revenue based on how the programs are managed, only one party—the OPM—has a primary interest in maximizing profits while taking part in steering committee discussions.[39]

For example, a four-member steering committee was formed as part of an agreement between Eastern Kentucky University

(EKU) and Pearson, with the two parties being equally represented.[40] However, meeting business could be conducted and votes could be made with just three members present. In theory, depending on meeting attendance, Pearson could steer the decisions being made for EKU's managed programs. If the steering committee cannot resolve a dispute, the matter is turned over to Pearson's chief executive officer and EKU's president. These two individuals answer to vastly different governing boards with vastly different purposes, and their actions can have enormous consequences on students' experiences and eventual livelihoods. Legality aside, there is no sound reason for an outsourcing agreement to create a steering committee that includes the paid contractor.

While there is no such thing as an ideal outsourcing agreement, the better among them respect the rights of faculty and students, maintain faculty control over academic governance, protect students from predatory recruiting, and keep the public institution intact by maintaining a safe distance between the college or university and the contractor.

The Century Foundation has continued to acquire and analyze agreements between public colleges and universities and their OPMs. This became all the more important when the COVID-19 pandemic sent entire campuses into virtual classrooms. Additional analysis has made it clear that there are even more questions faculty should consider as they advocate for better arrangements when outsourcing cannot be avoided.

1. What are the short- and medium-term plans for using the services of the OPM? Faculty, through their governance structures, should reject arrangements with contract terms that go beyond the timeframe that represents one cohort of students.

2. What are the enrollment goals behind the arrangement and whose goals are they? How many colleges, departments, and programs will be implicated in the arrangement? What is the justification for hiring an OPM for the program(s) of interest? Faculty should require a holistic analysis of the local and beyond-local demand for the programs from sources other than enrollment data. Likewise, faculty should require a full-scale analysis of the institution's existing internal capabilities and a plan for building internal capacity if needed.

3. What are the payment terms? Faculty should require evidence of revenue and expenditure modeling. If tuition sharing has been deemed necessary, it should be for a very limited time, the amount shared with the contractor should taper over time, and the contract should shift to fee-for-service terms within as short a timeframe as possible.

4. How quickly and with what resources will the new programs launch? Do the plan and timeline match the process that would be used for creating and offering new on-campus programs?

5. How many student start dates will be offered per year and why? Outsourced online programs have taken lessons from the for-profit college playbook, and some OPMs require their partners to offer multiple start dates per semester. To the prospective student, this is billed as a convenient feature that lessens the wait time between enrollment and the first day of class. However, there can be downsides to students, faculty, and the learning process when it comes to compressed semesters and quickly succeeding start dates. For the OPM, on the other hand, compressed schedules represent the ability to take in more cohorts (and revenue) per year and to move students through tuition cycles faster. Faculty groups should determine if they have a position on the number of start dates offered by their institution.

Reclaiming the public aspect of public-private partnerships is essential to meeting public institutions' democratic mission of education for the common good.

6. What is the source of instructional labor for the new programs? Specifically, is the college or university remaining in control of instructor recruitment, onboarding, and training? Will the programs be staffed in a way that matches on-campus program staffing? At what benefit or expense? One strategy to erode faculty control over these matters is for online divisions to use completely different sources of labor, including by recruiting instructors who live in states other than that of the main campus. Faculty groups should require full transparency of the staffing plan for proposed programs.

7. Are the outsourced programs replicas of programs that exist on campus already? Will the outsourced programs have parity with programs already offered on campus? Will instructors and students taking part in the online programs have access to the same resources as on-campus students? What is the plan for ensuring the new programs are as worthwhile to students as on-campus programs? These questions are important for faculty groups trying to determine whether the administration is creating access to an existing and worthwhile product or simply creating a potentially predatory, second-tier online campus with no meaningful connection to the institution.

8. Will the college or university remain in control over marketing strategy and content? The most egregious outsourcing agreements assume the OPM has control over which materials and messages are used in advertisements. For example, a contract between Southeastern Oklahoma State University and Academic Partnerships assumes the university has

approved marketing materials so long as the OPM *attempts* to share them.[41] Instead, the agreement should have been written to give clear control to the university, especially since the university suffers the consequences for advertising taken out in its name. In general, if the contractor is responsible for creating and placing ad content, a defined process for the college's or university's active review and approval should be included.

9. Student recruitment should be scrutinized. When services are paid on a tuition-sharing or commission basis, the inclusion of student recruiting is especially dangerous. Regardless of the payment terms, faculty should critically analyze the purpose of recruiting to fill virtual classrooms. If the documented demand for degrees, certificates, and other programs is real, could it be that online students would be just as likely to find their way to a physical campus as an online campus? Organic demand does not need to be drummed up. The reasons an online program might advertise go beyond organic demand. It could be that a college or university is specifically looking for students who do not live near the campus. This could be a losing game, since recent data indicate that 82 percent of online-only students who are enrolled in public colleges and universities live in the same state as their institution.[42] Alternatively, if colleges and universities hope to pull students who might attend a for-profit college, faculty should ask the decision makers how their institution's online degree offers something different to students who would otherwise enroll in a national for-profit. If the answer is that students get degrees bearing the public institution's name, then the institution is complicit in renting out its own brand. Faculty groups from public and nonprofit colleges and universities should work to address this problem at its root by curbing spending on advertising and recruiting by the for-profit sector.

Unfortunately, faculty and students can exist on a campus without knowing they have tens of thousands of peers in the virtual space. Online students—and especially prospective online students—are invisible and easy to overlook, making them a prime target for profiteers who operate under the guise of providing a public service. This invisibility increases the sense that the public is truly on the losing end of so-called public-private partnerships in online higher education.

Until the public is reaffirmed as part of public-private partnerships, prospective students should assume there are private actors with incentives that run counter to the purpose of public higher education. Reclaiming the public aspect, even in contexts where outsourcing has been normalized, is essential to meeting public institutions' democratic mission of education for the common good. ☐

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Five Freedoms That All Math Explorers Should Enjoy

By Francis Su

I thought I had chosen the right story for the occasion. Assembled before me was a group of eager Latino and African American children from an impoverished Los Angeles neighborhood. On this Saturday morning, I was serving with a program in which volunteers read books to kids. I had selected a delightfully illustrated picture book about going to the beach, and I thought it would be received well. But after reading a few pages in a most spirited voice, I could tell that the kids were not sharing my enthusiasm.

I paused, and asked: "How many of you have ever been to the beach?"

To my surprise—though this part of LA is just 15 miles from the ocean—only one of the eight children raised a hand. Wasn't going to the beach a quintessentially Californian thing to do?

Upon reflection, I realized that in a low-income neighborhood, parents often work multiple jobs to make ends meet, so they may not have the time or the resources to get to the coast. And when an African American friend of mine heard this story, he explained

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how African American people were systematically excluded from beaches and swimming pools because of Jim Crow segregation, not only in the South but all over the United States, including Los Angeles. I was completely unaware of this.

Alas, I had missed important historical, cultural, and economic contexts that made the beach inaccessible to these kids. It made me reflect on how I motivate my students to pursue mathematics. What contexts am I missing that I should be more aware of? What are the primary experiences that have shaped or are shaping them, and do those present obstacles to or opportunities for learning math? What are the unique strengths they bring to mathematical pursuits? And in what ways do mathematical spaces, like beaches, say "Open to all" but still feel restricted?

For me, the beach became a metaphor for various freedoms that are hallmarks of doing mathematics—freedoms delivered to some and denied to others. Just as they should be manifest at every beach, the freedoms we'll discuss should be present in every mathematical space. They are part of the allure of doing mathematics for those fortunate enough to experience math as it should be experienced. Conversely, the denial of those freedoms contributes to the fear and anxiety that many people feel toward math.

Freedom is a basic human desire. It is a central idea behind historic human rights movements and a sign of human flourishing. We seek freedom in big ways—think of the Four Freedoms that President Franklin D. Roosevelt said all people should have: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. We also seek freedom in small ways that can feel just as important, such as freedom with our time or freedom to make our own decisions.

I want to highlight five freedoms that are central to doing mathematics: the freedom of knowledge, the freedom to explore, the freedom of understanding, the freedom to imagine, and the freedom of welcome. As a math explorer, you should be aware of these freedoms so that you can claim them for yourself and aspire to fulfill them for everyone you encounter.

The Freedom of Knowledge

The freedom of knowledge is easy to underestimate, because if you have this freedom, you take it for granted, and if you don't have it, you are completely unaware of what you're missing. You have to know about the beach and know its many options for recreation—how to swim, surf, dive, tan, picnic, play volleyball, etc.—if you are to experience its freedom. These seem obvious to anyone who's been there, but if you are like the kids who didn't know about the beach, either because you were never told or because someone prevented you from going, you will not know the joys that await there.

Within mathematics, the freedom of knowledge is also fundamental. If you know just one method for attacking problems, you are limited, because that method may not work well for your particular problem. But if you have several strategies, you have the freedom to choose the option that is the simplest or most enlightening. Mathematics equips you to look for multiple ways to solve problems.

The mathematician Art Benjamin is a human calculator—he can multiply five-digit numbers in his head. While this sounds impressive, the mathematical fun for him is not in the calculation. The fun is in thinking of multiple strategies for doing a calculation easily and choosing the one that works best.[1] I'm not as practiced as he is, but I also rely on such skills to do calculations. For instance, if I want to multiply 33×27 in my head, I can think of four different ways to do it.

I can do it the "standard" way, which means taking thirty 27s and three 27s and adding them. That's $(30 \times 27) + (3 \times 27) = 810 + 81 = 891$. I don't find it so easy here to hold all the intermediate calculations in my head.

Or I can do it by factoring 27 as 3×9 and first multiplying 33 by 3, then multiplying that product by 9. That's $(33 \times 3) \times 9$, which is $99 \times 9 = (100 \times 9) - (1 \times 9) = 900 - 9 = 891$. This seems easier than the standard way.

Or I can factor 33 as 3×11 and first multiply 27 by 3 (which is 81) and then multiply that product by 11. That's 81×11, which is easy if I know the shortcut for multiplying by 11: take the digits 8 and 1 and insert their sum, 9, in between to get 891.*

Or I can see that this algebra identity might be helpful: $(x - y)(x + y) = x^2 - y^2$. So if I recognize $27 = 30 - 3$ and $33 = 30 + 3$, then the desired product of 27×33 is just $30^2 - 3^2 = 900 - 9 = 891$.

If someone asks me to do this calculation quickly, I will look at the quiver of arrows I have and choose the best arrow to attack this problem. For me, that would be the last way. The freedom of knowledge gives us a large quiver.

The Freedom to Explore

A second basic freedom that should be present in mathematical learning is *the freedom to explore*. Just like the wide expansiveness of the beach—with its shells, its sounds, and the treasure we fancy buried underneath—the learning of mathematics should be a place for exploration, so as to stimulate creativity, imagination, and enchantment. But some teaching styles don't offer this kind of freedom. I think of the difference between how my mom and my dad taught me math, a study in contrasts between obligation and exploration.
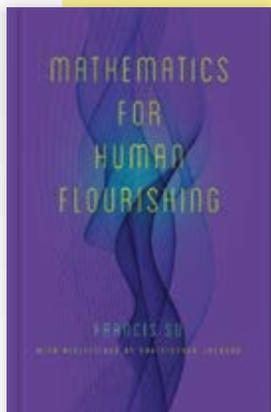
My parents wanted me to learn math at a young age, so even before I went to school, my father would teach me numbers and arithmetic. Since he was busy with his own work, he would make up long worksheets of addition problems to keep me occupied. I did them as a dutiful kid, but didn't find them very much fun. "Do this one over," he would say. "You can't go out to play until you get every one right."

My father's approach was a one-way transmission of information. He showed me what to do, but left me to myself to do worksheets. I followed the rules he taught me for arithmetic, often without understanding. I learned how to add numbers bigger than 10 by "carrying," but I didn't have any idea what I was doing. I was following recipes. And my father's praise and rewards were always connected to my performance. Now, my dad, in all fairness, was a good dad, but in an immigrant Asian American family, I could

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*This shortcut for multiplying by 11 will require a "carry" if the sum of the digits is 10 or more. For instance, to compute 75×11, you should add 7 and 5 to get 12, put the 2 between the 7 and the 5, and then carry the 1 by adding it to the 7, to get 8. Thus, the answer is 825. If you know some algebra, you can use it to show why the shortcut works: the number $10a + b$ is the number with digits a and b. Then $(10a + b) \times 11 = 110a + 11b = 100a + 10(a + b) + b$. This last expression does indeed suggest adding the two digits and putting their sum between them.

be shamed for turning in anything less than a perfect paper. That's not freedom.

By contrast, my mother's approach was relational. We played games that encouraged numerical thinking and pattern recognition. She sat with me, and together we read books about counting. And the books we read were also relational—full of wonder and delight. They invited more questions. Like: Why does that Dr. Seuss character have eleven fingers? It's not even five fingers on one hand and six fingers on the other, as you might expect, but rather four and seven! This fanciful strangeness invited further imagination. With my mother, I had the freedom to explore, and the freedom to ask questions, the freedom to think ridiculous thoughts. Questions and fanciful thoughts were praised.

This freedom is also at the heart of mathematics at higher levels of learning. As a high school senior, I attended a lecture for prospective students at the University of Texas at Austin. The topic was infinity, and the speaker was the math professor Michael Starbird. His lecture style was different than anything I had experienced in high school. It was highly interactive, and he was constantly asking questions of the audience—as if to invite us to be explorers together. I'd never before been in a room with 300 people where everyone was engaged and paying attention. This kind of interaction exemplifies a teaching style known as *active learning*. I left that lecture thinking: wow, if every class here is like that, college is going to be a lot of fun.

So I enrolled at Texas. Having placed out of calculus, and thinking I was "good" at math, I jumped into the subsequent course. It was in a traditional lecture style—this meant that the professor lectured without much interaction, and we took notes. On the first day, he began talking about matrices, a topic that I had never seen before and that wasn't on the list of prerequisites for the course. (A matrix is an array of numbers, and usually discussed in the class *after* this one.) And then he started *exponentiating* matrices, which means he took the number *e* and wrote an array of numbers as an exponent. For me, that was category confusion: like asking me to use an avocado to brush my teeth or putting my cat in my wallet.

I looked around and assumed that everyone else knew what was going on. I was intimidated, fearful of asking any questions because no one else was and the professor wasn't inviting them. Symbols were flying by as if a broken keyboard were stuck on the Symbol font. I dutifully took notes, but I had no idea what I was writing down. And that was just the first day of class. All semester I struggled to keep up, my understanding always two weeks behind. That was not fast enough to help me on my homework and exams, where I was often guessing at solutions I didn't understand. I was a hamster on a wheel powered by someone else, fearful that any mistake would mean I'd tumble off and do poorly in my first math class in college. This was not freedom.

The Freedom of Understanding

This story highlights a third kind of freedom that mathematics offers: *the freedom of understanding*. I was learning that if you go through life pretending you understand, you will always be limited by the things you don't understand. You will continue to feel like an impostor, believing that everyone else knows what is going on and you're the one who doesn't belong. By contrast, true understanding means you have to devote fewer brain cells to remembering formulas and procedures, because everything fits together meaningfully. Math education should promote, rather than inhibit, this freedom, but as learners we must strive for deep understanding even when our education isn't promoting it. This is where the hard work is.

After that first course, I almost didn't become a math major. But I decided to give it one more try. I took a course with a professor who was much more interactive and approachable, and I began to feel more confident again. Then, the next year, I took a class with Starbird. The class topic was topology—the mathematics of stretching things. Or, a little more accurately, it's the study of properties of geometric objects that don't change when you continuously deform the objects. For that reason, it is sometimes called "rubber-sheet geometry." This meant that drawing pictures was very important in this course, while numbers were almost nonexistent!

To my delight, Starbird was teaching in an "inquiry-based learning" format. There were no lectures. Instead, we were given a list of theorems and provided the challenge of discovering their proofs for ourselves. Through guided interaction with him and with one another, we learned how to present our ideas and subject
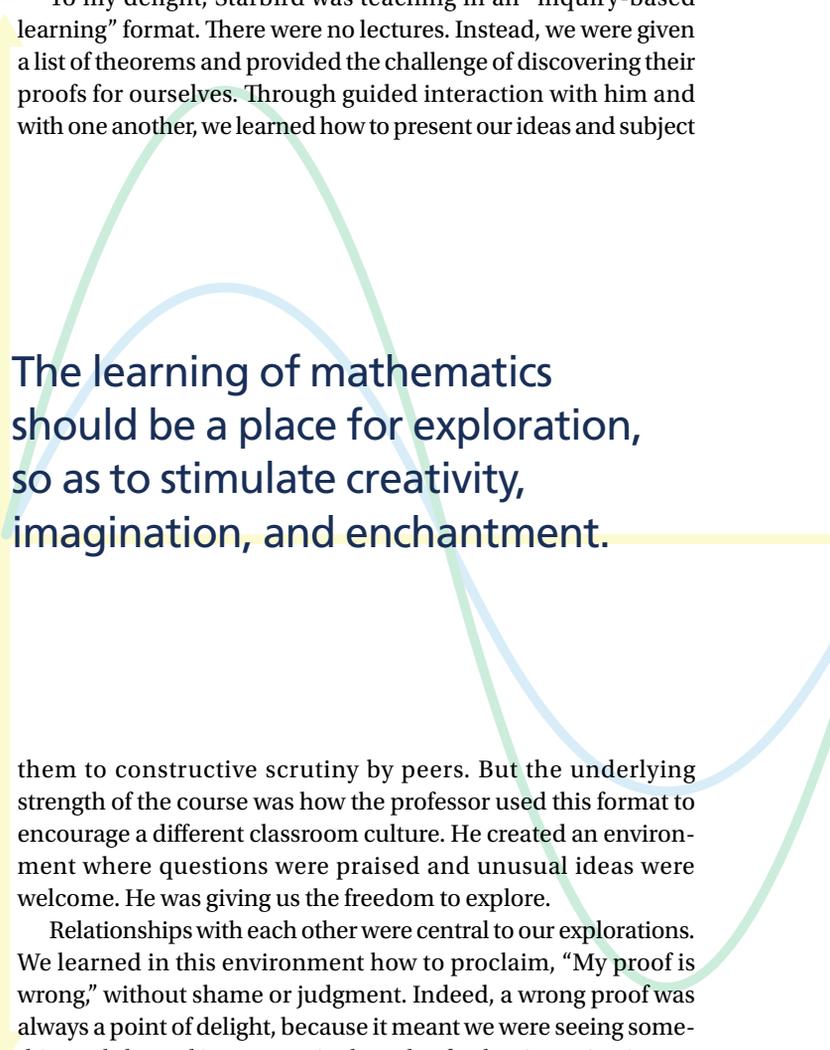
> The learning of mathematics should be a place for exploration, so as to stimulate creativity, imagination, and enchantment.

them to constructive scrutiny by peers. But the underlying strength of the course was how the professor used this format to encourage a different classroom culture. He created an environment where questions were praised and unusual ideas were welcome. He was giving us the freedom to explore.

Relationships with each other were central to our explorations. We learned in this environment how to proclaim, "My proof is wrong," without shame or judgment. Indeed, a wrong proof was always a point of delight, because it meant we were seeing something subtle, and it was a springboard to further investigation.

I've seen professors foster this kind of culture in more traditional lecture formats too, using active learning methods. In such classes, every day can be like a Dr. Seuss poem, filled with surprise and wonder, where the fanciful is celebrated.

The Freedom to Imagine

A fourth freedom present in mathematics is *the freedom to imagine*. If exploration is searching for what's already there, imagina-

tion is constructing ideas that are new, or at least new to you. Every child who has ever built a sand castle on the beach knows the limitless potential of a bucket of sand. Similarly, Georg Cantor, whose groundbreaking work in the late 19th century gave us the first clear picture of the nature of infinity, said, "The *essence* of *mathematics* lies precisely in its *freedom*."[2] He was saying that, unlike in the sciences, the subjects of study in mathematics are not necessarily tied to particular physical objects, and therefore mathematicians are not constrained like other scientists in what they can study. A math explorer can use her imagination to build any mathematical castle she wants.

> How much more fun could mathematical learning be if, at every stage, we had opportunities to use our imagination?

My topology class taught the practice of imagination. Topology, as I mentioned earlier, is the study of properties of geometric objects that do not change when you stretch the objects in a continuous way. If I take an object and deform it without introducing or taking away "holes," I haven't changed it topologically. So a football and a basketball are the same in topology, because one shape can be deformed into the other. On the other hand, a doughnut is not the same as a football in topology, because you can't turn a football into a doughnut without poking a hole in it. Topology is an entertaining subject because we get to construct all sorts of groovy shapes by cutting things apart, gluing things together, or stretching things in weird ways.

How much more fun could mathematical learning be if, at every stage, we had opportunities to use our imagination? You don't need to be doing advanced mathematics to do this. In arithmetic, we can try to construct numbers with fanciful properties. What's the smallest number divisible by all the digits in your date of birth? Can you find 10 numbers in a row that are not prime? In geometry, we can design our own patterns and explore their geometric natures. What kinds of symmetry exist in the patterns you like? In statistics, we can take a data set and come up with creative ways to visualize it. Which ones have the best features? If you're learning mathematics from a dull textbook, see if you can modify the questions so that they increase your imaginative capabilities. In doing so, you are exercising your freedom to imagine.

The Freedom of Welcome

Unfortunately, the prior freedoms—the freedoms of knowledge and of understanding, the freedoms to explore and to imagine—

are difficult to secure without the last freedom, which is *the freedom of welcome*. This is a freedom missing from many mathematical communities.

Beaches, as I learned, have a historical association that is exclusionary, which keeps people, even today, from enjoying those spaces. Imagine this scenario at the beach. There's no longer a sign saying that you aren't allowed, but you don't come very much, because your parents never came at all. There's no one chasing you out, but you get sideways stares.

People question whether you meant to go to *another* beach. Some think you're the service staff at the beach showers and ask for more paper towels in the restroom. Others avert their gaze and clutch their children tightly when you walk past. People make up seemingly arbitrary rules for you, telling you that you can't cook *that* food for your picnic, or play *that* game on this beach. You go instead to the volleyball courts for a pickup game, but no one invites you to play. They don't expect that you know or will want to learn the game. The beach may be open to you, but you aren't really welcome.

Sadly, mathematical communities can be like that. We say we value diversity, but there are exclusionary undercurrents. Consider these examples.

Your name is Alejandra, and you've noticed that in every math textbook since grade school, the names in generic examples are all white male names. In middle school, you come up with novel ways to solve problems, but your teacher never seems interested in solutions other than the ones she knows. Your high school math teacher is lecturing, and he makes eye contact only with boys.

You place into an advanced math class in college and find the work challenging, but the professor encourages you to drop to a less advanced class rather than encouraging you to continue. You're a college athlete with a demanding practice schedule every afternoon, but the professor makes himself available only for afternoon appointments. A professor calls a proof "trivial" and "obvious"; you think there's something wrong with you because it isn't trivial and obvious to you. He notes that "students like you don't often do well in this major." A math competition is going to take place; the organizer invites every math student but you to the practices. You come from a culture that prizes community and storytelling, yet your math professors talk about math as if it's completely devoid of any history or culture, and all the assigned work is to be done alone.

You decide to go to graduate school in math, but there are few women in the program and no Latina students like yourself, and certainly no Latina women on the faculty. No one knows how to pronounce your name; they call you "Alex" without your permission. The graduate student lounge in your department has no art or plants or color; it feels sterile, and you certainly don't want to hang out there. The other students seem very competitive, and quick to point out others' mathematical errors in unsupportive ways. Your advisor seems uninterested in your life outside work, even when you signal that you're struggling with child care. Yes,

you've made a decision to start a family in grad school, but the administration seems inflexible in handling that.

You become a mathematician, and are thrilled to get a job at a college where teaching is valued, but your friends at research universities ask with pity, "Are you happy there?" When you go to conferences, your small stature and dark complexion mean that you are often mistaken for "the help" at conference hotels. When you publish papers collaboratively, people always think that the other person did more of the work. So you feel pressure to publish papers alone. You love all the things that mathematics offers, but it doesn't feel like it's worth *this*.

Taken together, Alejandra's experiences can feel life draining and oppressive, even though the people involved may have had the best intentions and been completely unaware of what she was going through. Collectively, they are a coercive use of power. Alejandra does not have the freedom of welcome. You might wonder why she hangs in there at all.

To be welcoming means more than just allowing people to coexist. It means extending an invitation of welcome—to say, "You belong," and follow it up with supportive actions. It means maintaining high expectations and providing high support.

Expectations can influence how a student does in class. There is substantial research on "expectancy effects," which shows that teacher expectations can affect how students learn. The most famous is the 1966 Rosenthal-Jacobson study, in which students were given a fake aptitude test and their teachers were told which students were expected to "bloom" (when in reality the so-called good students were randomly selected). Over the next year, those students did better than their classmates.[3]

This is a silent captivity of expectations. It holds both student and teacher captive. Teachers are bound by a limited imagination of a student's potential. Students are bound to someone else's idea of who they can be, and they don't have the freedom to be free. A freedom of welcome would say, "I believe you can succeed, and I will help you get there."

In the book *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks discusses her experience as a student in an all-Black school in segregated America. She praises the teachers who were on a mission to help the students reach their highest potential.

> To fulfill that mission, my teachers made sure they "knew" us. They knew our parents, our economic status, where we worshipped, what our homes were like, and how we were treated in the family....

Attending school then was sheer joy. I loved being a student. I loved learning.... To be changed by ideas was pure pleasure.... I could ..., through ideas, reinvent myself.[4]

You can hear how those teachers practiced the freedom of welcome. They got to know everything about their kids, not just their academic performance. These students' education was rooted in community. Because of the freedom of welcome, hooks had other freedoms: the freedom to explore ideas and the freedom to imagine a new identity for herself.

By contrast, after schools were integrated and she changed schools,

> knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved.... We soon learned that obedience, and not a zealous will to learn, was what was expected of us....

> For [B]lack children, education was no longer about the practice of freedom. Realizing this, I lost my love of school.[5]

The beach was now open, but there was no welcome, no community or hospitality. hooks was captive to expectations: always feeling like she had to prove herself. She was afraid that if she spoke up, she would be perceived as stepping out of bounds. Education felt like domination. Without the freedom of welcome, she lost all the other freedoms.

Having the freedom to explore builds *fearlessness in asking questions* and *independent thinking*, and we experience the joy of discovery.

To be clear: I'm not advocating segregation. I'm saying that real welcome must involve real freedom, especially when that freedom has been denied in the past.

These freedoms in mathematics are associated with several virtues. The freedom of knowledge leads to the virtue of *resourcefulness*. We can take the tools we know about and bend them to solve our problem. Having the freedom to explore builds *fearlessness in asking questions* and *independent thinking*, when we are not shamed for brainstorming aloud and we experience the joy of discovery. It also builds in us the skill of *seeing setbacks as springboards*, as we learn to not simply discard wrong ideas but explore how they can lead us to good answers or push us off into new areas of investigation. The freedom of understanding builds our *confidence in knowledge*, because understanding builds a firm foundation of facts

I See You

The Importance of Having a Mentor

We assume that learning mathematics doesn't involve culture. This is a common assumption, especially if you are not part of a marginalized group. It leads to inaccurate assessments of student knowledge. A mathematician friend shared this example with me:

> On an examination, I asked the classical Fermi problem "Estimate how many piano tuners live in this city." A student timidly raised his hand. He whispered to me, "Is a piano tuner a device or a person?" Other students thought good piano players would tune their own pianos, like guitar players do. Some students thought piano tuners would work in a music store. Few students had a sense of how often a piano might need tuning, or how long it would take to tune a piano. This example opened my eyes to how important background experience can be in dealing with questions that may appear to be mathematical, but instead bring up all sorts of cultural or experiential issues.

I could have been one of those perplexed students, since a piano wasn't a household item for me. Now imagine a student without the requisite cultural experiences who constantly encounters obstacles like these. Would they feel like they belong? Cultural barriers are impossible to avoid, but if we are aware of them, we can mitigate their effects.

The math education professor William Tate points out that such experiences are common to African American children in mathematical spaces, who often encounter instruction based on white middle-class norms, and he contends that connecting pedagogy to the lived realities of African American students is essential for equitable instruction.[1] He advocates that teachers take a "centric" perspective: allowing and expecting students to center their problem solving in terms of their own cultural and community experiences, and encouraging students to think about how the same problem might be viewed from the perspectives of different members of the class, school, and society. For example, a teacher could reframe the problem about piano tuners as an estimation problem whose subject the students choose as relevant to their daily lives or struggles.

In 2015, I had the great pleasure of running MSRI-UP (Mathematical Sciences Research Institute—Undergraduate Program), a summer research program for students from underrepresented backgrounds: Hispanic, African American, and first-generation college students. Later, I asked them to tell me about obstacles they'd faced in doing mathematics. One of them, who did wonderful work that summer, told me about her experience in an analysis course after she returned to her university:

> Even though the class was really hard, it was more difficult to receive the humiliations of the professor. He made us feel that we were not good enough to study math, and he even told us to change to another, "easier" profession.

As a result of this and other experiences, she switched her major to engineering.

Let me be clear: there is no good reason to tell someone that she shouldn't be doing mathematics. That's her decision—not

cemented together by meaning and insight. And the freedom to imagine encourages the virtues of *inventiveness* and of *joyfulness*, because that freedom gives you room to explore and to take delight in all the wild things your mind might conjure up.

When I encountered difficulties in graduate school, feeling underprepared and out of place, with professors questioning my ability to succeed, these virtues rescued me. I knew I had the beginnings of research skills, because I'd experienced independent thinking. I leaned on my fearlessness in asking questions to speak up when I didn't understand. I knew the joyfulness in creating mathematics for myself. And the confidence in the knowledge I already had helped me to trust that I would eventually catch up, through earnest effort and hard work.

Freedom is a crucial ingredient of learning and doing mathematics, so we ought to consider what freedom entails. I know that some people define freedom as "the absence of constraints," as if it means "do whatever you want." I don't believe that's what true freedom is.

True freedom never comes without cost, relationship, or responsibility. Think of that teacher who poured their time and energy into you, gave you the space to ask questions, and showed you how to explore the beach and imagine the castles you could

yours. You may not know what she's capable of. One of my friends who is now a math professor described this incident that happened to him when he was a student:

This faculty member had one of those private in-the-office conversations with me that begins with "I think it may be only a kindness to tell you that…," followed by a stated concern that I was not really cut out for a career in mathematics. I've not done all that badly since then, and in fairness I have to add that the faculty member sought me out in later years to apologize for the comment. I consider the person a friend, but when I'm working with our graduate student training program, I do stress that any conversation that begins with "I think it only a kindness to tell you that" will almost never be a kindness.

Look at my friend now—a successful mathematician. It's too easy for such pronouncements to reflect personal biases and limited information.

Oscar, another student from MSRI-UP, told me about his experience as a math major who, unlike his peers and because of his background, did not enter college with any advanced placement credit:

I noticed how different my trajectory was, however, while I was in a Complex Analysis course. A student was presenting a solution on the board which required a bit of a complicated derivation halfway through. They skipped over a number of steps, saying, "I don't think I need to go through the algebra … we all tested out of Calculus here anyway!," with my professor nodding in agreement and some students laughing. I quietly commented that Calculus was my first course here. My

professor was genuinely surprised and said, "Wow, I did not know that! That's interesting." I was not sure whether to feel proud or embarrassed by the fact that I was not the "typical math student" that was successful from the beginning of their mathematical career. I felt a sense of pride in knowing that I was pursuing a math degree despite my starting point, but I could not help but feel as though I did not belong in that classroom to begin with.

The reason Oscar was in that class to begin with was the active support of another professor. Oscar said:

She presented me with my first research opportunity and always encouraged me to study higher math. I was also able to confide in her about a lot of the internal struggles I had with being a minority in mathematics since, as a female, she had a similar experience herself! My complex analysis professor became one of my mentors as well. I think it was just an interesting moment because she didn't realize how her reaction to the situation could have hurt me (and I don't think she's necessarily at fault!). It was more that her reaction piled onto the insecurities I held in regards to being a minority with a weak background in math.

Actually, Oscar didn't have a "weak" background—he had a standard background. I'm pleased to say that Oscar and his team from that summer have published a paper on their research, and he is now in graduate school.

You hear in Oscar's story the importance of having an advocate, someone who says, "I see you, and I think you can

flourish in mathematics." Everyone can use this encouragement, but this can be especially important for marginalized groups who already have so many voices telling them they don't belong. Can you be that advocate?

We must be mindful to not set up structures for learning that disadvantage people with weaker backgrounds or make them feel out of place. When I was teaching at Harvard, there was a regular calculus

> We must not set up structures for learning that disadvantage people with weaker backgrounds or make them feel out of place.

class, an honors calculus class called Math 25, and on top of that—for those with very strong backgrounds—a super honors class called Math 55. Ironically, I regularly encountered students *in the honors track* who felt that they didn't belong in the math major, because they hadn't placed into the super honors track. I had to keep reassuring them that "background is not the same as ability." I wish that college and grad school admissions would remember this too. The mathematician Bill Vélez says this about barriers at the graduate level: "In mathematics we value creativity, yet we evaluate students on knowledge. Departments erect barriers to keep down applications, and it works. Top-rated departments have few minority students."

–F. S.

Endnote

1. W. Tate, "Race, Retrenchment, and the Reform of School Mathematics," *Phi Delta Kappan* 75, no. 6 (February 1994): 477–84.

build. Think of that parent who provided whatever resources they had so that you could get to the beach, and instilled in you a resolve to overcome any obstacles. Think of the real welcome that some provided, helping you to enter, the welcome that took real energy and care. And think of the cost of your own commitment to invest yourself in a subject that is deep and wide and beautiful, so that you now have the freedom to flourish on that beach in ways you never could have otherwise.

Those of us who have experienced the freedoms of mathematics have a significant responsibility to welcome others to those freedoms as well. □

Endnotes

1. To learn some of his shortcuts, see A. Benjamin and M. Shermer, *Secrets of Mental Math* (New York: Three Rivers, 2006).

2. G. Cantor, "Foundations of a General Theory of Manifolds: A Mathematico-Philosophical Investigation into the Theory of the Infinite," trans. W. Ewald, in *From Kant to Hilbert: A Source Book in the Foundations of Mathematics*, vol. 2, ed. W. Ewald (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 896. Italics in the original.

3. R. Rosenthal and L. Jacobson, "Teachers' Expectancies: Determinants of Pupils' IQ Gains," *Psychological Reports* 19 (1966): 115–18. It is worth noting that this study has attracted controversy. An interesting account of this study, including critiques and follow-up studies, can be found in K. Ellison, "Being Honest About the Pygmalion Effect," *Discover*, October 29, 2015, go.aft.org/wr7.

4. b. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3.

5. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*.

Concept Mapping

A Powerful Tool for Learning

By Kripa Sundar
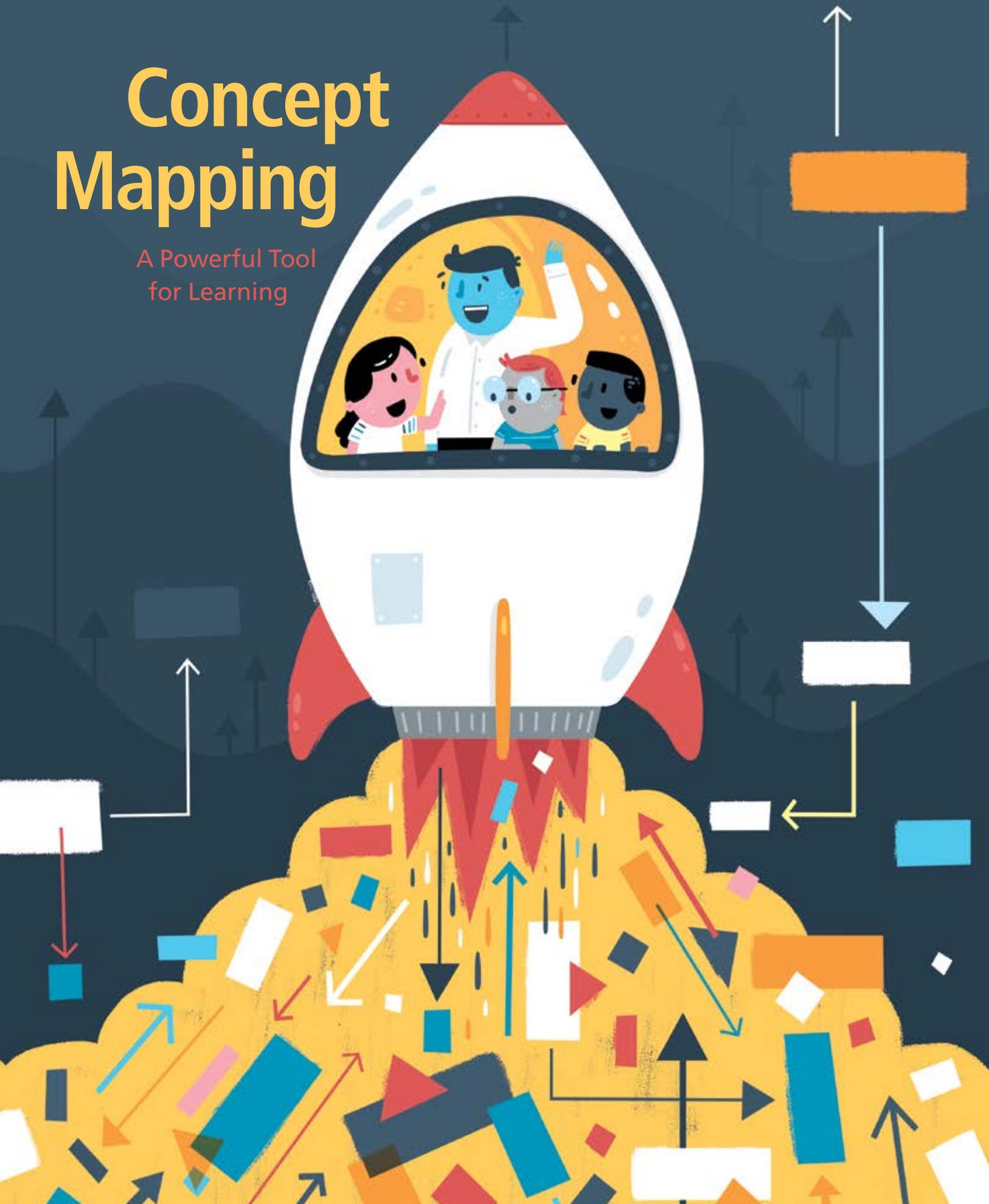
I'd like to start this article with a confession: I'm a big fan of concept maps. As a learner, researcher, and educator, I've depended on concept maps to become more intentional with my time and to better understand topics. Why? My top two reasons are their efficacy across subjects and age groups and their versatility in application. Here, I delve into what concept maps are, why they are effective, and how we can leverage them in different ways.

What Are Concept Maps?

In their simplest form, concept maps are graphic organizers or visual representations of knowledge, often presented in a node-link-node format. Nodes, which are usually nouns, represent key concepts and are linked by directional arrows labeled with descriptive words that define the relationship between the two nodes. Ideally, the linking words are verbs or contain verbs such that the concepts and linking words read as a sentence (even if the sentence is grammatically incorrect). In the figure below, the map identifies that COVID-19 has highlighted inequities.

Most learners have more than one point of reference for a concept. When each of these conceptual connections are represented in node-link-node format, the resulting diagram is called a "concept map." Joseph Novak, who has had a long career as a professor of education, research scientist, and business consultant, is often credited with establishing the "modern" body of research on concept mapping. He conducted a landmark 12-year-long study of science concept learning in which students mapped changes in their knowledge structures by constructing concept maps.[1] He referred to concept maps as diagrammatic representations of one's internal knowledge structures.[2] This is a powerful description because it acknowledges the fundamental uniqueness of each individual learner's schema (or mental model) development; this, in turn, suggests no two maps on the same topic need to look the same—there is no "right answer" to a mapping prompt. Concept maps allow learners to showcase what they know and how they organize relevant concepts; they also reveal where there are gaps in their conceptual understanding of a topic.

Are Concept Maps Effective Tools for Learning?

Multiple meta-analyses (which average effects across studies to summarize the available evidence) provide consistent evidence to support the effectiveness of concept maps.[3] In fact, they're more effective—to varying degrees—than learning from lectures, discussions, or text summaries (like outlines or lists). The positive effect

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on learning has been observed across ages (particularly middle school through higher education), settings (classroom and laboratory), and subject areas (including STEM and non-STEM).[4]

Many factors impact how effective concept maps are. Looking across studies, effectiveness can depend on context (such as the layout of the map), whether students are studying existing maps or constructing their own, how learning is assessed, how long students focus on the map, and more.

A recent meta-analysis, which is consistent with previous meta-analyses, provided evidence for strong positive effects on learning when a learner constructs a concept map and moderate positive effects when they study a map.[5] Constructing concept maps was consistently *more* effective than studying concept maps. This finding is unsurprising given that constructing concept maps requires deeper and more active cognitive engagement than studying them. After all, learning takes effort. In practice, I've observed that students take longer to learn how to make a concept map (which may be less common) than to learn how to read a map (which may be more intuitive).

> Concept mapping is expected to facilitate meaningful learning— learners *purposefully* **connect** new information with their PRIOR knowledge.

Why Are Concept Maps Effective?

We've seen that constructing concept maps (or concept mapping) and studying concept maps are both effective, but to different degrees. Why? Let's review theories that ground hypotheses related to the efficacy of concept mapping as well as studying concept maps. However, please keep in mind that these are just hypotheses—the body of research does not yet clearly indicate why concept maps, and especially concept mapping, work.[6]

Theory Underlying Concept Mapping

At the most basic level, concept mapping is expected to facilitate meaningful learning—learning in which learners *purposefully* **connect** new information with their PRIOR knowledge.[7] Each emphasized element presents a necessary component for meaningful learning:

1. Students must have relevant PRIOR knowledge.
2. Students must *purposefully* link knowledge.
3. Students must present key concepts and make explicit, specific **connections** between these concepts.

These ideas may resonate with most educators as the foundation of their teaching. They also draw parallels to the encoding-storage-retrieval model of learning. By drawing intentional

connections between concepts, which may include a mix of new and previously learned concepts, the learner "makes meaning" of the content they are learning.* So, we could say that the practice of concept mapping combines two powerful learning strategies: retrieval practice (as students draw on their prior knowledge) and elaboration (as they add new concepts and make connections) to result in a visual representation of student knowledge.[10] The table below explores how the practice of concept mapping expands on these elements of meaningful learning.

Theory Underlying Studying Concept Maps

Studying concept maps is also expected to support meaningful learning by presenting the macrostructure of a topic, including relationships between concepts.[11] This increases the relevance between concepts (i.e., how two concepts are related or inform each other) for learners. Some researchers also advocate for presenting concept maps to provide students with a framework to organize new information.[12] Specifically, guiding students' meaning making by providing maps that use spatial placement (i.e., having closely related concepts close together on the map) and directional arrows with labels may support students who have difficulty reading or limited prior knowledge of the topic in developing their mental schemas on the larger topic.[13]

Additionally, the graphical representation of key concepts and the relationships between them are hypothesized to present students with less extraneous cognitive load than reading about the topic, which can lead to favorable outcomes in learning.[14] For example, in a

*In addition to concept mapping, two other strategies that facilitate meaningful learning are self-explanation[8] and elaborative interrogation.[9]

text, a concept may be repeated multiple times as it is connected to other topics, but in a concept map, each concept is typically only represented by one node irrespective of how many connections it may have to other topics. And, texts usually have complex grammar, but the map is stripped down to the concepts and their linkages. A study tracking students' eye movements found that students who were provided a concept map in addition to the text spent less time reading the text but still marginally outperformed the group of students who had only the text.[15]

Another common hypothesis for why studying concept maps is effective is grounded in dual coding theory[16] and cognitive theory of multimedia learning.[17] Both posit that verbal knowledge (written or spoken text) and mental images reside in separate but interlinked memory channels, and that by leveraging both, we can improve our long-term memory by increasing the number of channels through which the information is later retrieved.

Three Keys to Concept Mapping

There are three key elements to mapping well:[18]

1. Meaning is conveyed by the spacing of concepts; we place two closely connected concepts close together spatially. Think of a family tree as an example.
2. The structure of the concepts, such as a hierarchy or cycle, is clear. For example, many concept maps read top to bottom,

How are concept maps any different than mind maps?
Depends on how picky you want to be. Concept maps are expected to be effective because they present, visually and verbally, both key concepts and the concrete relationships between concepts. Often, a mind map does not have labels describing the relationships between concepts, which may make it less effective for initial learning and for review.

Concept Mapping for Meaningful Learning

Step	Meaningful Learning Element	Activity	Learner Benefit	Teacher Benefit
1	Retrieving knowledge	Students make a list of all key concepts pertaining to a specific topic or guiding question.	Learners document prior and new knowledge in one place.	The teacher can see the breadth of students' knowledge as well as what they see as relevant. This offers an opportunity to identify gaps or misconceptions.
2	Elaborating through intentional cognitive engagement to integrate relatively new and old knowledge	Students organize the concepts in a structure using directional arrows, typically in a hierarchical fashion with the broadest concept at the top and more details below.	Learners draw their understanding of concepts in an easy-reference visual format.	The teacher can see learners' depth of knowledge.
3	Elaborating through explicit connections	Students label directional arrows linking concepts with one to three words that describe the relationships between the concepts.	Learners are forced to articulate the specific nature of the relationships between concepts.	The teacher can see how many and which connections students have made as well as what misconceptions need to be addressed.
4	Revisiting	Students return to the concept map to update it with new information, which can result in changes in the structure of the map and/or in the relationships presented.	Learners visually see changes in their learning and are more likely to see the macrostructure of the topic (i.e., the forest, not just the trees).	The teacher can see changes in learners' conceptual understanding.

beginning with the biggest or broadest topic and moving down to the details.

3. Connections between concepts are explicit and purposeful. In concept maps, these are represented by directional arrows with linking labels.

In K–12 classrooms, graphic organizers such as story maps, mind maps, knowledge maps, and spider maps are sometimes referred to as concept maps, but they lack one or more of these three critical features. In my experience, the third feature is often missing; students will draw lines or arrows between concepts but will not add labels to describe the connections between the concepts. I find that this omission makes these other graphic organizers far easier to create but also far less useful—not labeling the links can become the root of conceptual misunderstanding. The other forms of graphical organizers can be useful, but it's helpful to pause and reflect: When would you use a concept map? When would you choose to use other organizers? Why?

Using Concept Maps in Your Classroom

The research on concept mapping is rich and varied in applications, ranging from use as formative assessments[19] to supporting critical thinking.[20] Let's look at five ways we can use concept maps in our classrooms, starting with studying a map (the application that requires the least effort by learners) and progressing to independent concept mapping (which requires the greatest effort).[21] Student learning is directly proportional to the extent of cognitive effort, so perhaps consider the first two applications for low-stakes learning, as an introduction to concept mapping, or to warm up to applications three through five.

Application 1: Support mastering new information by giving students a concept map that summarizes a topic. Studying expert-created maps (like Figure 1 on the right) is effective for learning and may be an important first step before students try to construct maps.

If you are creating the concept map, be cautious of *concept map shock*, in which a learner is overwhelmed with how much information is in the map. One trick to minimize the likelihood of concept map shock is to use your key learning objectives as the guiding question for constructing your map. In my experience, creating these topic summary concept maps are a challenging and fruitful exercise for us, as subject-matter experts. When creating such maps, I'm forced to acknowledge that I've consolidated many small concepts into one big concept—but my students may not have learned about either the bigger concept or its smaller components yet. So, developing the map pushes me to consider the content from my students' perspective and see the full range of concepts I will need to teach. Other times, creating a map has forced me to reconsider how I am weighting and allocating time to concepts I would like to cover.

Also, keep in mind that giving students the map does not automatically translate to them using the map. They may need training to "read" the map. Research suggests students likely will approach it similar to English text—top to bottom, left to right.[22] Near the end of your unit, you may want to ask students to "translate" the map into a few paragraphs (or a short essay, depending on grade level, topic, etc.) and resummarize the information by constructing their own maps. This gives you three hits with one stone—solid instructional planning, your expert concept map to guide your
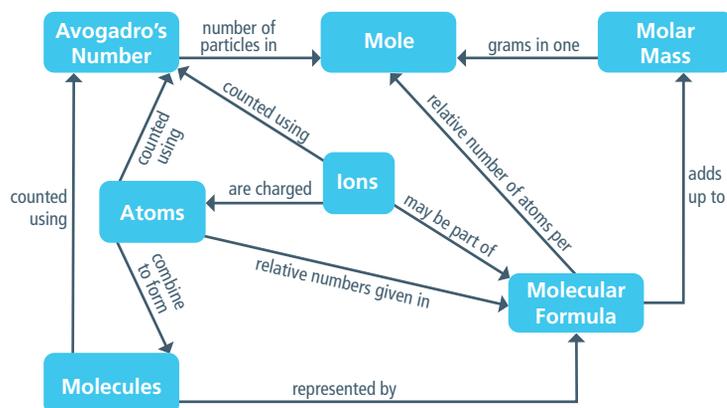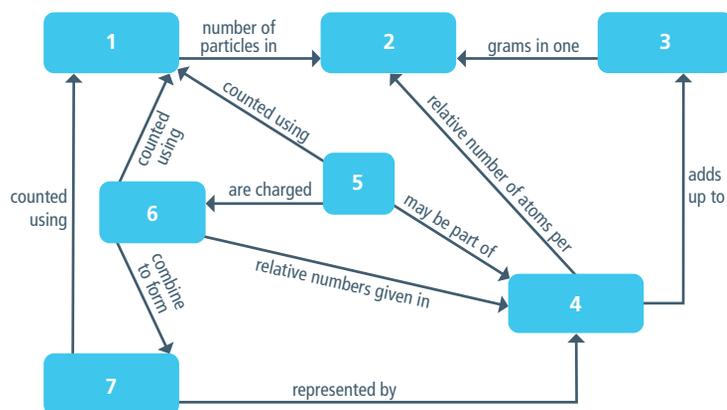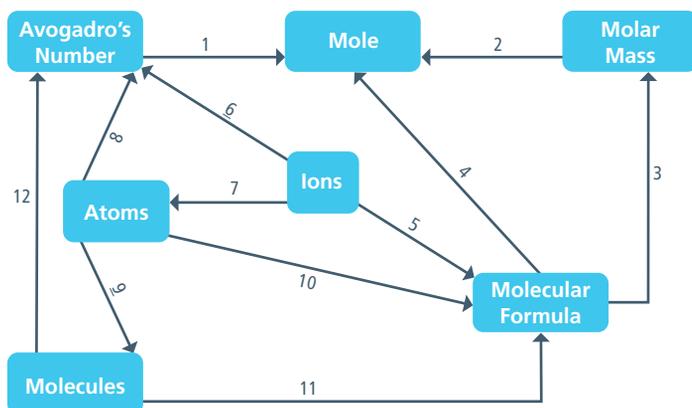
Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

students, and a model for engaging learners in showing their understanding by creating their own maps.

Application 2: Support students to organize their knowledge by completing partially filled concept maps. These map templates can also be used as formative assessments. With a chemistry undergraduate professor, Paul Buckley at Washington State University,

my colleagues and I have explored two options for these templates: (1) blanking out key concepts but keeping the relationship labels filled in (see Figure 2 on page 43) or (2) blanking out relationship labels but keeping the concepts filled in (see Figure 3 on page 43).* Completing such concept maps will engage students in retrieving information from their long-term memories (which is an effective strategy for mastering content) and will often highlight for learners (and teachers) what they know and what they need to study further.

Due to the templated format, students can receive "answer key" expert maps to self-assess or engage in peer grading and discussions. These templates can also be used as lecture organizers where students fill in the blanks while listening to the lecture.

> There is no right answer for mapping. It is about documenting our learning process.

Application 3: Kickstart the concept map creation process for students by providing a guiding question (framed by your learning target) and a list of concepts. Ask students to draw a concept map in response to the guiding question using the provided concepts. Compared with the two applications above, this approach involves less prep work by teachers while still allowing them to see how well students can demonstrate the relationships between key concepts.

Many students find their first few attempts at concept mapping difficult. Some researchers suggest that practice, feedback, and training on relational framing can help improve the structural quality, elaboration, and relational quality of student mapping.[24] It can help such students to write out their responses to the guiding question as a long paragraph and then summarize it as a map. With practice, they may become better at mapping. Of course, providing the text option can bring up questions about the usefulness of creating the map. In such instances, I remind my students that this multimodal format will likely increase their ability to remember the connections. Often, I try to share the science behind constructing concept maps and the idea that there is no right answer for mapping before we begin. Mapping is about documenting our learning process (but is also quick to grade). I also remind learners to use directional arrows and label the arrows with one to three words describing the relationships between concepts.
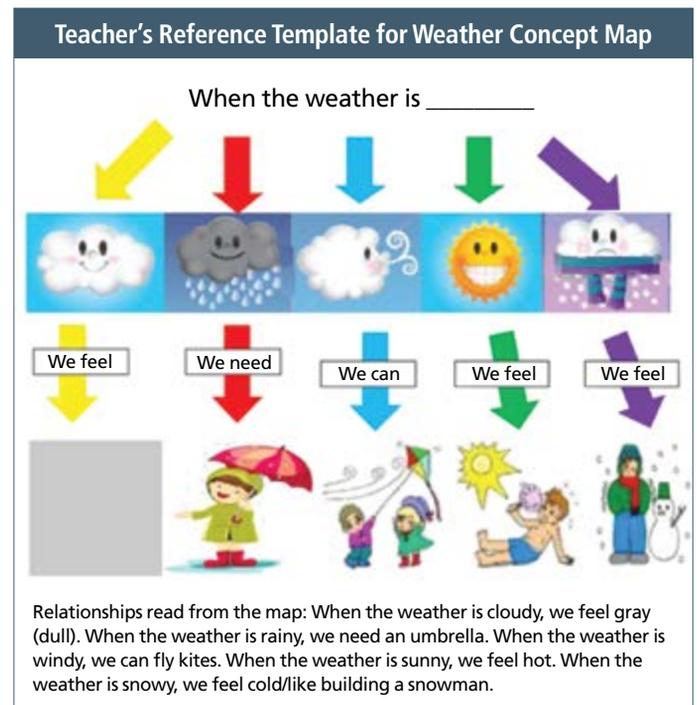
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*Our preliminary investigations into the effectiveness of different uses of concept maps had mixed results.[23] Students who either translated the expert map into a paragraph or merely studied it outperformed students who filled in partially blank maps. This was surprising given the evidence supporting the construction of maps. Further analysis indicated that when students had sufficient prior knowledge to be able to accurately fill in the blanks, they were more likely able to apply that knowledge to respond to additional questions and to perform better.

Application 4: Incorporate concept mapping on a regular basis by having students build a list of concepts in an ongoing manner. This is particularly helpful for learners who are learning brand-new subjects—including all the new terms and their meanings. When the list of concepts is updated regularly (say at the end of every lesson) and a new map is created every week, students have an opportunity to forge relationships between concepts they are learning in an ongoing manner and see changes. The map grows slowly week-on-week; then, at some point, students will realize they need to redraw their maps because they now have a changed understanding of the relationships between concepts or need fewer concepts to showcase the central ideas. This steady approach allows for more practice mapping as well. The revise-and-repeat approach might work better for long units (e.g., ecosystems) or even yearlong courses (e.g., US history). Regular mapping allows teachers to see and address potential misconceptions and/or cognitive dissonance as they emerge.

Revisiting previous concept maps can serve as a great review and allow learners to see how their knowledge structures have changed over time. This mapping can happen at an individual level or even as a collaborative class activity (active concept map wall, anyone?). Whole-class and/or small-group mapping can also serve as a modeling activity for learners to progress toward constructing their own maps independently.

Interestingly, consistently engaging students in concept mapping is effective even with very young children—with the right supports. In one experiment, my colleagues and I worked with kindergartners to help them create concept maps about the

Figure 4

Teacher's Reference Template for Weather Concept Map

When the weather is _____

We feel   We need   We can   We feel   We feel

Relationships read from the map: When the weather is cloudy, we feel gray (dull). When the weather is rainy, we need an umbrella. When the weather is windy, we can fly kites. When the weather is sunny, we feel hot. When the weather is snowy, we feel cold/like building a snowman.

weather (see Figure 4 on page 44) using preprinted images, arrows, and labeling words (so they could assemble maps without having to write).[25] We also encouraged the children who were just beginning to learn to read to say their linking words aloud. We started with the teacher modeling for the class. Then, students broke into pairs for collaborative concept mapping for three consecutive weeks in which we saw children adding concepts and offering unique interpretations of their maps.

Application 5: Ask learners to create maps from scratch. Provide learners with a guiding question and scaffold their mapping process by laying out steps:

- Build a parking lot of concepts.
- Prioritize which concepts and relationships to include in response to the guiding question.
- Lay out the concepts keeping in mind the meaning conveyed by how concepts are spaced.
- Connect and label relationships.
- Adjust as necessary.

This construction of concept maps demands intensive cognitive resources and a great deal of time—but also offers rewards in deep learning. Concept mapping may also be good for reviews and/or summative assessments. This application takes the least prep time from an educator, but is only possible when learners have been trained in the practice of concept mapping and feel confident. See Figure 5 below for a concept map I created on concept maps.

What's the Catch?

As with all learning strategies, there are tradeoffs involved. With concept mapping, here are several considerations:

1. **Time:** Concept mapping by the educator (e.g., application 1) or by the learner (e.g., application 5) will take a significant chunk of time, depending on how well known the topic is and the scope of the guiding question. In class, I'd budget for at least 15 minutes if we already have a list of concepts ready to map.
2. **Content:** The content usually dictates the format. Some content might naturally lend itself to a cyclical map (e.g., the life cycle of a butterfly) while other topics may be better suited for a diagram rather than a concept map. Choose the format or strategy based on what makes the content explicit.
3. **Ease of adoption:** All forms of meaningful learning take cognitive effort. Some strategies, like quizzing (a form of retrieval practice), are relatively easy to adopt and apply. Concept mapping is different from how most learners document their knowledge; it requires training and practice before showing benefits for learners.
4. **Cognitive effort:** Concept mapping requires extensive processing of concepts (e.g., prioritization of relevance, organization, layout), which can be taxing for some students. Cognitive mapping may be most beneficial when there are complex interactions or relationships that are central to learner understanding.
5. **Concept map shock:** Occasionally, concept maps created by experts may have too many concepts and/or arrows, overloading the learners' capacity to process and study the map. Having a focused guiding question helps mitigate this risk.

Figure 5
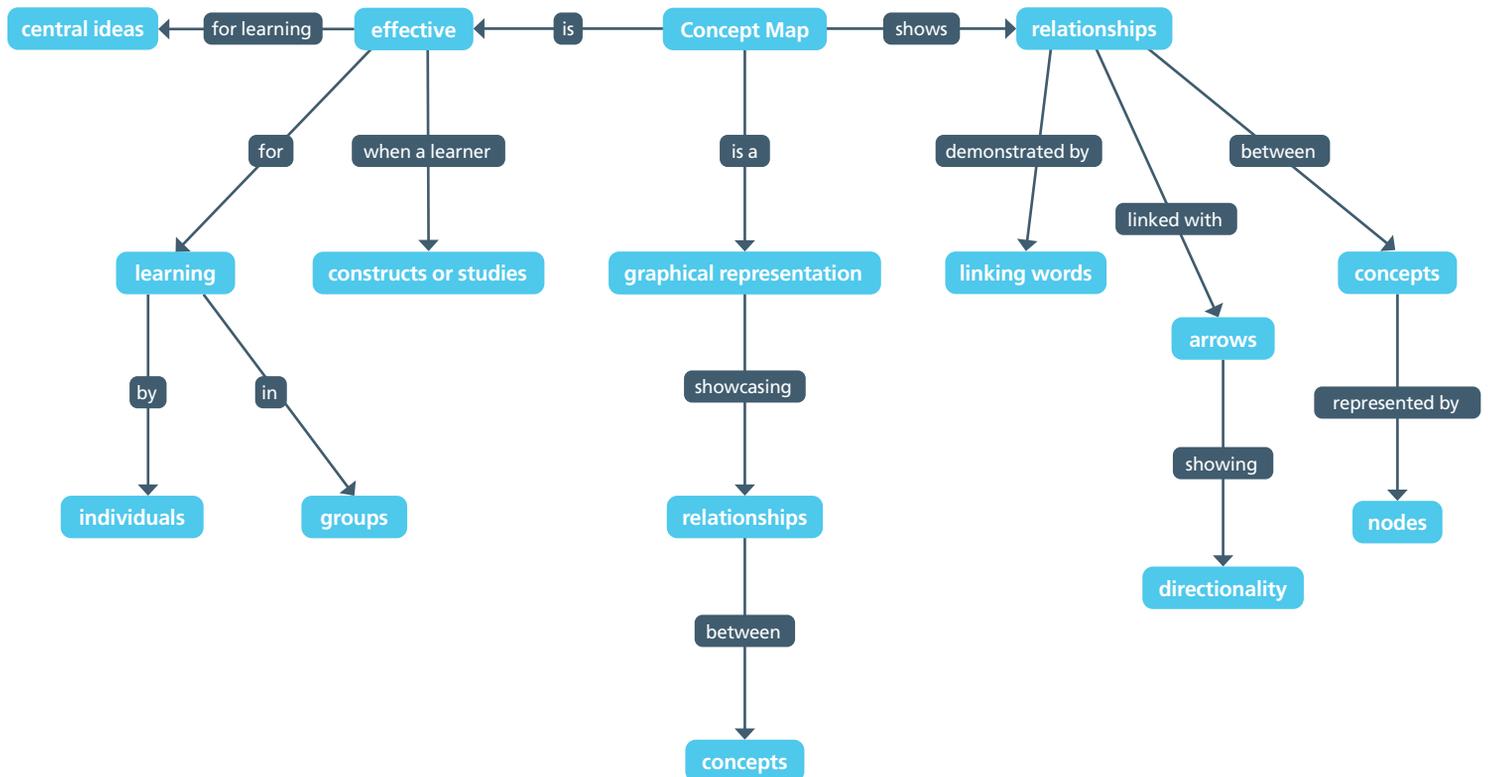
Concept Mapping: A Step-by-Step Guide for Students

1. Focusing Stage
Choose a question that guides and focuses your mapping process.
- Ask yourself, "What is my learning objective?" This will help narrow your guiding question.
- Maps are great tools to picture relationships between concepts. What system of relationships are you trying to capture?
- Very broad or very narrow guiding questions may not be helpful. How much depth do you need to cover in this concept map? Consider how often you are going to map.

Kickstarter Examples
- In what way (or how) does X affect Y?
- What is the role of X in Y?
- What factors shape the occurrence of X?
- How is X formed?

2. Brainstorming Stage
Make a parking lot of ideas.
- Think about the guiding question and write down all the key concepts that come to mind.
- Ignore how relevant or irrelevant the words coming to your mind are. Just write them down. Sometimes a concept you initially think is irrelevant may become relevant as your concept map grows (or vice versa).
- Avoid drawing a map at this stage.

3. Organizing Stage
Take a step back and evaluate your concepts.
- Once you have all your concepts written, start identifying concepts that answer the guiding question. Are all the concepts you wrote down necessary to answer the guiding question? Are any missing?
- Evaluate your concepts. Is there a hierarchy of importance in your list of must-have concepts? Is there a necessary flow of concepts, like a flow chart, web, or cycle?
- Keep your parking lot alive by removing or adding concepts as you feel necessary.

4. Layout Stage
Draw your map.
- Writing the guiding question at the top can help you keep focused.
- Start with the biggest concept (in terms of number of relationships and/or importance).
- Connect concepts with directional arrows; one-way, two-way, dotted, and/or colored arrows are all great ways to build the map—if you define what each means.
- There is no "wrong structure." Concept maps are typically hierarchical, but they don't have to be. This is your representation of your response to the guiding question. It's likely going to look different than your classmates' maps.

5. Linking Stage
Label the directional arrows.
- Make sure all concepts have at least one connection to another concept.
- Add a linking word or phrase on every arrow connecting every two concepts. These links are ideally made with verbs to describe the relationship between the concepts and form a short sentence. To focus, ask yourself: How are these two concepts related in context of the guiding question?
- When you're done with your map, a person must be able to read the concepts and linking labels to form a meaningful sentence (even if it is with poor grammar).
- Linking is usually the toughest part of concept mapping. If you find yourself struggling, revisit the guiding question and try responding by writing a paragraph or talking to yourself or a classmate to find the missing link. If you don't get it, that's OK—you've now identified a gap in your understanding that you can fill as you learn!

6. Revising Stage
Revisit and update.
- A concept map is an ongoing document. When your understanding changes, repeat steps 2, 3, 4, and 5. Having a series of maps works well as a learning journal.
- Concept maps often change structures during revisions.

–K. S.

As most educators would agree, these areas of consideration are common when we evaluate any pedagogical strategy, and there is often an element of trial and error as to what works best for which topic—and even which students we have in class. For me, concept mapping will always be among my top strategies to experiment with in my research and practice because of its versatility across the different functions of learning and instruction as well as its ability to capture conceptual understanding in the most remarkable way. After all, there is no pedagogical unicorn, but concept mapping comes close. □

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Reading Opens the World Webinars

Harnessing the love of reading is key to helping our students recover from the academic and emotional challenges of the pandemic. "Reading is key to life, to joy—to our very existence," said AFT President Randi Weingarten when announcing the AFT's Reading Opens the World campaign.

This multiyear, multimillion-dollar campaign is designed to support students, educators, and families and foster an ongoing love of reading. It focuses on four areas of literacy support: professional development resources for teachers and school staff to help students read well; research-based resources for parents and caregivers; literacy-focused partnerships between families, communities, teachers, and schools; and free books for children and young people.

Teachers can learn more about teaching reading and literacy in the content areas through the Reading Opens the World webinar series hosted on Share My Lesson. These sessions give educators more tools to improve students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills and provide actionable teaching practices that can be quickly implemented in the classroom. Each hourlong, for-credit session is grounded in the science of reading.

Maximizing Reading and Vocabulary Instruction

Several sessions give a deep dive into the components of reading comprehension. Start with "A Primer on the Science of Reading" to learn how decoding skills and language comprehension lead to reading comprehension, and follow up with "Literacy in the Content Areas" to learn evidence-based recommendations for engaging students in reading throughout the day. "MAXimize Your Teaching: Active Learning Through Texts" explores strategies to engage students before, during, and after reading, and "Strategies to Maximize Vocabulary Instruction" gives best practices for increasing students' vocabulary, which is critical for comprehension.

Improving Linguistic Equity and Inclusion

Teachers of all grade levels and subject areas can cultivate a deeper understanding of the academic, social, cultural, and emotional aspects of language and literacy. In "Crafting Linguistic Autobiographies to Build Cultural Knowledge," educators will explore and better appreciate the richness of their own and their students' language heritages. "Culture and Communication Matter: Affirm and Uplift Students Through a Language and Literacy Equity Audit" covers valuing students' language strengths and the knowledge they bring to the classroom. Finally, "The Sound of Inclusion: Using Poetry to Teach Language Variation in the Elementary Grades" explores the benefits of poetry for celebrating linguistic diversity.

Meeting English Language Learners' Needs

Three webinars focus on better meeting the complex needs of students who are becoming bilingual. "Improving Literacy of ELLs: Tips, Resources and Strategies for Individualized Instruction" provides an array of resources and is a great place to start building your knowledge of English language development. "Literacy and ELLs: Scaffolding with Visual and Linguistic Supports" reviews specific models of visual and linguistic supports to help English language learners better understand what they read. And "Literacy and ELLs: Using Academic Language Instruction to Unlock Success" explores strategies to improve students' comprehension of academic texts.

This is just a sample of the webinar series; more sessions are planned for later this year. Visit go.aft.org/jc1 for the complete series. To learn more about the Reading Opens the World campaign, visit aft.org/read and join the Reading Opens the World community on Share My Lesson at sharemylesson.com/read. Questions or comments? Please reach out to us: content@sharemylesson.com.

–THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM

Recommended Resources

A Primer on the Science of Reading (available on demand)

Literacy in the Content Areas (Thursday, March 24, 6 p.m. EDT)

MAXimize Your Teaching: Active Learning Through Texts (Thursday, April 21, 6:30 p.m. EDT)

Strategies to Maximize Vocabulary Instruction (Thursday, April 28, 6:30 p.m. EDT)

Crafting Linguistic Autobiographies to Build Cultural Knowledge (Thursday, May 5, 6 p.m. EDT)

Culture and Communication Matter: Affirm and Uplift Students Through a Language and Literacy Equity Audit (Thursday, May 26, 6 p.m. EDT)

The Sound of Inclusion: Using Poetry to Teach Language Variation in the Elementary Grades (Thursday, June 2, 6 p.m. EDT)

Improving Literacy of ELLs: Tips, Resources and Strategies for Individualized Instruction (available on demand)

Literacy and ELLs: Scaffolding with Visual and Linguistic Supports (available on demand)

Literacy and ELLs: Using Academic Language Instruction to Unlock Success (Thursday, April 14, 6 p.m. EDT)

To register for these webinars, visit go.aft.org/jc1.

READING OPENS THE WORLD

aft.org/read

Reading is a foundational skill necessary for virtually everything we do. It opens possibilities for all children to succeed—to learn and grow, to explore and imagine, to investigate and verify, and to lead fulfilling lives. Reading well instills confidence and helps reduce inequities. The disruptions due to the pandemic make focusing on literacy even more important, to assist our students not just to catch up but to thrive.

In December, the American Federation of Teachers launched Reading Opens the World, an initiative that focuses on:

- Giving teachers and school staff the tools and professional development that translate the science of reading into usable resources to help students read and read well.

- Giving parents and caregivers fun and research-based tips and tools to support literacy.

- Building on and forging new connections among families, communities, educators and schools to be partners in students' literacy.

- Giving children and young people free books to read, love and keep, because...

#ReadingOpensTheWorld