

SECOND EDITION

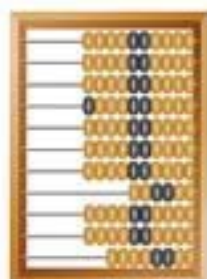
TEACHING TO LEARN, LEARNING TO TEACH

A Handbook for
Secondary School Teachers



$$A^2 + B^2 = C^2$$

$$E = MC^2$$



PAZ
PEACE
PAIX

ALAN J. SINGER and the
HOFSTRA NEW TEACHERS NETWORK

TEACHING TO LEARN, LEARNING TO TEACH

Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach uniquely addresses three problems that frequently concern pre-service and beginning teachers: classroom control, satisfying state and federal mandates, and figuring out exactly what is the role of the teacher. It provides an alternative to methods textbooks that compartmentalize different aspects of teaching. Bridging these divisions by integrating practical, theoretical, and critical considerations in secondary school teaching, it presents a model student-centered approach for designing lessons, developing personal connections with students, and building classroom communities: PRO/CLASS Practices (Planning, Relationships, Organization, Community, Leadership, Assessment, Support, Struggle). The broad principles of PRO/CLASS Practice are presented as part of an integrated approach to teaching—not as a recipe to be followed mechanically. Pre-service teachers are encouraged to reinterpret the principles and continually redefine them as they develop their own reflective practice.

Changes in the Second Edition:

- Updates throughout with attention to the Common Core State Standards, high stakes testing, the possibilities and limitations of technology use in the classroom, and preparing for the job market;
- Fully revised chapter on literacy highlighting critical literacy, types of literacy, literacy standards, learning complex material while improving reading skills, and technological literacy in a digital age;
- New interviews with young teachers 10 years later (2003 to 2013) and with several second-career teachers;
- Companion Website: Supplemental planning, teaching, and assessment materials; 32 extended essays including a number of the author's widely read *Huffington Post* columns; interviews with beginning and veteran teachers; Ideas for Your Professional Portfolio, Resume, and Cover Letter; Recommended Websites for Teachers.

Alan J. Singer is Professor of Secondary Education and Director of Social Studies Education in the Department of Teaching, Literacy and Leadership at Hofstra University in New York and the editor of *Social Science Docket* (a joint publication of the New York and New Jersey Councils for Social Studies).

TEACHING TO LEARN, LEARNING TO TEACH

A Handbook for Secondary School Teachers

Second Edition

Alan J. Singer and the Hofstra New Teachers Network

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The Second Edition of *Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach* is dedicated to Mary Kennedy Carter (1934–2010), teacher, teacher educator, and lifetime political activist.

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION: THE AUDACITY OF TEACHING

In some ways it was harder to write this second edition of *Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach* than I anticipated. Writing the book requires that I feel positive about the prospects for good teaching. I have been a teacher for more than four decades and I truly value what we do. But I have often felt that our profession is under assault from politicians who want to magically improve test scores without investing in improving the conditions of people's lives and business interests, what "Occupy Wall Street" protesters call the "One-Percent," desirous of making profit at the expense of students, teachers, and the American public and willing to undermine effective teaching and genuine education if necessary to achieve their goals.

Whether or not you are a big fan of Barack Obama's presidency, I think you will agree he is very good at turning a phrase and can be inspirational. His memoir, *The Audacity of Hope* (Crown, 2006) was on *The New York Times* bestseller list for 30 weeks and sold millions of copies.

The Audacity of Hope was based on themes Obama, then a senator from Illinois, presented in a speech at the 2004 Democratic Party national convention. Senator Obama asked his audience, "Do we participate in a politics of cynicism or a politics of hope?... The audacity of hope! In the end, that is God's greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation; the belief in things not seen; the belief that there are better days ahead. I believe we can give our middle class relief and provide working families with a road to opportunity. I believe we can provide jobs to the jobless, homes to the homeless, and reclaim young people in cities across America from violence and despair. I believe that as we stand on the crossroads of history, we can make the right choices, and meet the challenges that face us."

To build on this statement by then-Senator Obama, I believe there are better ways to teach, to engage students, to encourage learning and understanding, and to inspire young people to full participation as active citizens in a democratic society. I believe in the audacity of teaching and with this book I want to recruit you to the cause.

Firuza Uddin, a former student who teaches in a difficult inner-city high school, wrote in discussing the reasons she is a teacher: "I will not compromise if it means abandoning what I believe is important about education and preparing students for life in the 21st century." These are powerful words and she is a powerful woman and teacher. I believe all of you can be like her.

In the [last chapter](#) of this book I issue a challenge to teachers to become political activists. In the 1930s, an educational philosopher named George Counts asked, "*Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?*" In light of recent developments in teaching and in American society in general, I have rephrased his question. Dare teachers not help build a new social order?

This Book Is Based on the Following Ideas:

1. Classroom practice should be based on goals and an understanding of students as complex and diverse human beings.
2. Pre-service and beginning teachers will benefit from learning about the experiences of other pre-service teachers, new classroom teachers, and veterans.
3. There are principles of effective teaching in secondary schools that span the subject disciplines, and it is important that new teachers make connections with the work of their colleagues in other content areas.
4. Although content expertise and the mastery of pedagogical skills are essential for teachers, empathy with students and a sense of personal mission are the keys to successful teaching.
5. Learning takes place all of the time—but students are not necessarily learning what teachers intend them to learn.
6. Everything that takes place in the school and classroom is part of the curriculum.
7. Learning is social—teachers should build on it, not fight it.
8. Effective teaching in inclusive middle school (6–8) and high school (9–12) classrooms with diverse student populations can involve the same student-centered pedagogical practice with differences in degree or emphasis based on student needs rather than differences in kind of instruction—everyone can be treated like an honors student.
9. Developing classroom community and student leadership is the most effective way to promote student learning—the only people teachers can control are themselves.
10. An overall goal in secondary education is to promote greater freedom for students as they assume increased individual and collective responsibility for their own learning.
11. People can learn to be student-centered, constructivist, critical teachers.
12. Although it takes extended experience, three to five years, and hard work to master the skills needed to be an effective teacher, these skills are neither magical nor inexplicable, and can be developed by beginning teachers.
13. Every teacher must make a decision: Will you rock the boat—“fight the power”—or become “another brick in the wall” of an educational system that rewards some students, tracks many into limited options, and leaves others behind?
14. In a time period when educational policy is made by politicians, technocrats, business leaders who call themselves philanthropists, and for-profit corporations, all distant from classrooms, schools, and students, and each with their own self-serving agenda, it is incumbent on teachers to join with students and parents to fight for what we believe a twenty-first century education in a highly technical democratic society can and should be. This is not the time to stand back and let others make decisions while we remain silent.

RATIONALE AND DESCRIPTION

In secondary school general methods classes and classroom analysis seminars that accompany student teaching, pre-service teachers are frequently obsessed with three problems: classroom control, satisfying state and federal mandates, and figuring out what exactly is the role of the teacher. These problems are exacerbated by methods books that compartmentalize different aspects of teaching (practical, theoretical, critical). This book is designed to bridge these divisions and integrate the practical, theoretical, and critical considerations in secondary school teaching. It draws on the theoretical work of Michael Apple (2004), George Counts (1978), Linda Darling-Hammond (2010), Lisa Delpit (2006), John Dewey (1916, 1927/1954), Paulo Freire (2000, 2004), Howard Gardner (2006), Maxine Greene (1993), Martin Haberman (1995), Herbert Kohl (1994), Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009), and Nel Noddings (2005), and it offers different ways of looking at the dynamics of classroom interaction for understanding social, cultural, and developmental influences on student behavior; for organizing lessons, units, and curricula; and for defining and establishing the diverse roles of teachers.

The book is designed as a handbook for pre-service and beginning teachers. I anticipate that some readers will examine the entire package in the order that material is presented, whereas others will sample topics selectively based on their interests and needs. I hope the book works both ways.

The book opens and closes with challenges to pre-service and beginning teachers to reflect on what they liked and did not like about their own school experiences and to consider their goals as teachers. It argues that many problems students perceive of as individual are really a result of the way that schools and classrooms are organized.

The book addresses broad topics in secondary school teaching rather than the needs of specific subject areas. Although examples are included from different subject disciplines, the focus of the book is on the relationships between disciplines (concepts, skills, practices) rather than distinctions, a major focus in recently developed national curriculum standards.

While discussing different approaches to secondary school teaching (middle school, 6–8, and high school, 9–12), the book offers a model student-centered approach based on a series of PRO/CLASS Practices. It includes sample “nuts and bolts” teaching techniques that can be used in different types of classrooms and by teachers employing different pedagogical approaches (lesson and unit design, activities, questions, projects, team learning, community building). Although the broad principles of PRO/CLASS Practices are presented as part of an integrated approach to teaching, pre-service and beginning teachers are encouraged to reinterpret the principles and continually redefine them as they develop their own reflective practice. Conversations with pre-service teachers, interviews and conversations with teachers, essays about classroom issues, and reflections

on teaching goals and process, and the “nuts and bolts” of classroom practice are integrated throughout the text.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Singer teaches introductory secondary school methods classes and social studies methods and curriculum classes, supervises secondary school student teachers, and leads classroom analysis seminars in which student teachers reflect on their pedagogical practice, reconsider their teaching philosophies and goals, and examine ways that teachers can develop personal connections and build classroom communities with students from diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds. He is also the faculty advisor and facilitator for the Hofstra New Teachers Network, which provides support and a forum for discussion for beginning and experienced teachers, many of whom are working in urban and suburban minority school districts. Alan frequently writes about educational issues. He is the editor of *Social Science Docket*, a joint publication of the New York and New Jersey Councils for the Social Studies, and contributes regularly to the Huffington Post, Daily Kos, and History News Network.

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Many people assisted with the first and second editions of this book. They include Gary Benenson (City College of New York-CUNY); S. Maxell Hines (Winston-Salem State University); Felicia Hirata (Baruch College-CUNY); Judith Kaufman, Roberto Joseph, Maureen Murphy, and Sally Smith (Hofstra University); Michael Pezone (High School for Law Enforcement); and Judith Y. Singer (Long Island University-Brooklyn Campus—retired). The following Hofstra University teacher education students commented on versions of the revised manuscript: Jessica Best, Amanda Carmelitano, Denise Cooper, Chris Dazzo, Michael Engelke, Gennaro Fontano, Jessica Gaglione, Kerri Gallagher, Lisa Gershburg, William Gibbons, Sean Haberman, Kelly Peckholdt, Derek Pearce, Debra Prevete, Michael Schulman, Firuza Uddin, Nicole Vasheo, and Debra Willett. Molly Clingenpeel, Christine Filipkowski, Patrick McAuley, Chelsea Tennariello, and Danny Watson worked on the indexes. I also wish to thank Naomi Silverman and the staff at Routledge for their efforts.

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BOOK I

Goals and Responsibilities for Teachers

A Letter to Future Teachers

Dear Future Teachers,

I like to think of myself as a veteran teacher, but you might just consider me old. I student taught while an undergraduate student at the City College of New York in 1971. I doubt if many of the people reading this were born yet. In 1993 I shifted permanently from high school teaching and became a university-based teacher educator. This was before the development of the Internet, PowerPoint presentations, laptop computers, and Smart Boards. I suspect some of you still were not born.

I may be an educational dinosaur, but I pride myself that I am constantly in schools, observing student teachers, meeting with teachers, working on curriculum projects, and teaching guest lessons. In 2011 and 2012 I was a Black History Month speaker for incarcerated teenagers at New York City's Riker's Island Correctional Facility.

In September 1969 I began an adventure that has lasted a lifetime when I entered the teacher education program at the City College of New York. The adventure has not always been smooth, there have been some unplanned side-trips, but I would not change my decision if somehow I could return to the past and start all over again. Welcome to your adventure in teaching, teaching to learn and learning to teach. I hope it is as rewarding and exciting as mine was and still is.

This new edition of *Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach* marks the tenth anniversary of the original edition. Much has changed for teachers, students, and schools during the last decade, but much has also remained the same. In this edition I will reaffirm much of what I wrote about earlier, while at the same time I will address the newest trends and problems in education as best as I can. I hope you find both my original ideas and my new suggestions useful to you as a student in a pre-service teacher education program.

I opened the first edition of this book with a "Letter to Future Teachers" and planned to start this edition the same way. In preparation to rewrite the book, I asked pre-service and new teachers in one of my graduate teacher education seminars what they thought would be important for me to say. After reading their comments and thinking about them, I decided to start the letter with what they have to say before adding my own thoughts and welcoming remarks.

Each of these teachers has something different to say. But I think there is a common thread in their comments. Teaching is an act of creativity. You need to learn what you can from college professors and experienced teachers, but they do not have magic bullets or miraculous recipes for success. Neither do I. Ultimately you must find your own way as you discover who you are as a teacher and as a person. I include comments on the book and on teaching by five new teachers here, with additional contributions to the discussion online.

Derek Pearce student taught as an undergraduate in the Uniondale School District on Long Island in New York. As an undergraduate, he was a student in my social studies methods class on two occasions and I was his student teaching field supervisor, so he certainly has a good sense of my approach to teaching. Derek is White, the town where he grew up and the schools he attended where almost all White, however he chose to student teach in a district where the students were nearly 100% minority—African American, Caribbean

American, and Latin American. He was just starting the Master's program at Hofstra University when he wrote this advice to student teachers. Soon after that he got his first full-time teaching position at a New York State designated failing school. If anyone can help turn it around, it is Derek.

Relax. Take a deep breath. Sure, your lesson may have just tanked, the kid in the second row got the best of you one too many times, and you might have a splitting headache, but it's all going to be OK. Forget that you have a mountain of papers to grade, your own undergrad work to finish, and that you have to finish the weeks lesson plans by tomorrow. EVERYTHING is going to work out. As a student teacher, those are the words that I needed to hear. What is important to remember is that everyone struggled through student teaching. No one finishes their placement without a few bumps and bruises.

Debra Prevete is a mathematics teacher. She student taught at a diverse high school after growing up in a relatively homogenous White community. She stresses how as a beginning teacher she was always learning.

When I read the "Letter to Teachers" from the first edition, what stood out to me most was a comment by a beginning teacher named Jennifer Palacio. She wrote: "When I began to discover my own ways to do these things, I started to become a teacher. You cannot be someone else. You have to be you." I confess I often wonder why we learn all of these methods and strategies in college classes. I tried to incorporate them in my math classroom and they did not seem to work for me. Like Jennifer, I realized I needed to do "my own thing." But at the same time, I recognized my thing was actually a variation of things I learned from former teachers and my professors. As teachers, it is important to understand we have a lot more learning to do as well. Our teaching will only improve if we work at it.

William Gibbons was fortunate to get a teaching job right after graduating from college. Although he grew up in a suburban community, he accepted the challenge of working with innercity students. William is a risk-taker and believes the willingness to take risks is at the core of being a good teacher.

I had a fantastic high school experience with great friends and motivating teachers. One of the first things I realized as a new teacher was that my job was not to recreate my own past. I think too many pre-service teachers decided to become teachers because they liked high school and want to relive it over and over again. It is the wrong reason to become a teacher; it cannot be done. For every student like myself who enjoyed school, there are tons of others who did not. Education needs to be available for every student. Our job as teachers is to change the world, not to replicate it. One further thought. Stop worrying whether your teacher education professors are up-to-date or are trapped in an idealized world. The most important things you will learn from them are to take risks, to have the courage of your convictions, and to welcome creativity and experimentation.

Amanda Carmelitano grew up in a relatively affluent overwhelmingly White suburban community but chose to student teach in a very diverse high school in Providence, Rhode Island. After "subbing" in suburban Long Island for two years, her adventure took her to a full-time position as a social studies teacher in a middle school in Virginia.

While student teaching, I realized that there is no perfect recipe to become a good teacher. It takes time to develop teaching skills and strategies. You want to reach every student right away, however, many of your efforts will fail, simply because you are inexperienced. My first lesson plan ended miserably because

the content was too difficult for the students and the lesson was long and boring. I try to take every failure as a chance to learn from my mistakes.

Kelly Peckholdt student taught in rural areas of upstate New York while attending Siena College. She currently teaches social studies in a suburban school district on Long Island in New York and runs her own dance studio.

Many teacher education professors have an idealized view of how schools and classrooms operate and what teachers can achieve. As a beginning teacher, I found the emphasis on theory in many education programs is not working. Theory alone does not prepare teachers for the realities of being in their own classroom. I was very successful as a student teacher and thought I would walk into a classroom my first year and pick up where I left off. I learned the hard way that it takes time to establish yourself in the classroom and earn the respect of students. My undergraduate education program and student teaching prepared me to a certain extent, but I learned more about classroom management, discipline, lesson planning, dealing with parents, etc. on the first few days of teaching than I did in four years of college. New teachers cannot allow themselves to get discouraged—it does get better. This is something else I learned the hard way. Maybe we all have to learn it the hard way.

Kelly writes about the idealized world presented in many of her teacher education classes. She is not the only one who feels this way. According to a report issued by an organization called Public Agenda, education professors were “out of sync” with public school teachers and parents on fundamental issues such as what and how teachers should teach. A survey found that classroom teachers and the general public wanted discipline and basic reading, writing, and math skills to be the top priorities in public schools. However, university-based teacher educators insisted that schools prepare children “to be active learners,” and that teachers help students develop their “curiosity” and “a love of learning.”

The executive director of Public Agenda concluded that professors of education were not “arming graduates of their programs for the real world they face.” She was supported by Sandra Feldman, at the time president of the American Federation of Teachers. Feldman said the survey confirmed what her union's membership already knew: “College education hasn't prepared them for the realities of the classroom.”

As you prepare to become a teacher, you need to consider whether schools of education and out-of-sync professors are really responsible for poor student performance on standardized tests, our country's failure to achieve international standards, violence in and around urban schools, poverty, drug abuse, alienation, teenage pregnancy, inadequate school funding, overcrowded classrooms, and deteriorating buildings.

We live in a society that pays considerably more to educate the children of the affluent—children who already have numerous advantages—than the children of the working class and poor. In the New York City metropolitan area where I live and work, some private schools charge between \$30,000 and \$40,000 a year for tuition, while according to a 2006 report by the New York State Department of Education wealthy suburban districts were spending about \$15,000 per student. Meanwhile, New York City and other urban districts and high-needs rural districts were spending about \$8,000 a year to educate students in mainstream regular education classes.

The kind of student-centered inquiry-based examination of our world proposed by education professors is

expensive, and in our society it is only made available to the few. Does that mean that classroom teachers in less affluent communities who value this kind of teaching are doomed to fail and foolish to try?

I believe the answer is a resounding “NO!” The beginning and experienced teachers who worked with me to write this book are committed to the idea that the way we teach can make a significant difference in the learning and lives of our students. We refuse to give up on public education and our students.

As a social studies teacher in New York City public high schools for 14 years, I learned that there are no simple solutions to changing education and no magic formulas for teaching young people. Teaching is hard work and involves constant learning by educators. Successful teaching requires an understanding of children, a vision for their future, and a strategy for connecting students with that vision.

As teacher educators, my colleagues and I use our own experience as teachers; our understanding of the theories of thinkers such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire and Maxine Greene; and insights gained from educational research to help the next generation of teachers become ready for the classroom. New teachers always worry whether they will know enough to teach and whether they will be able to control students. They often do not agree with what I think is important. But I try to share with them some of the things I have learned and value.

- Lessons that relate to student interests, involve them in activities, and are appropriate to their academic performance level, will stimulate student curiosity and engage them as active learners.
- Students who feel that their teachers care about them as human beings and are willing to respond to their needs and concerns do better in class.
- Learning is social. Students do better academically as they develop a sense of relationship with each other and their teachers, and as they take responsibility for what happens in their classroom.
- Change never happens instantaneously. Why should children behave any differently from other people? Being an effective teacher means engaging in a long-term struggle to convince students that your goals for the class make sense and are worth examining.
- As a teacher you cannot change everything in the world, in your school, or even in your class. But we also know that as you become a better teacher you will be able to make an impact on more people.
- “Finger pointing” does not help. Politicians blame unions. Universities blame high schools. High school teachers blame middle school teachers. Middle school teachers blame elementary school teachers. Elementary school teachers blame preschools and parents. Parents blame schools and teachers. Instead of focusing on blaming each other for what has not worked, we need to discover and implement ideas and practices that will make a difference.

My primary goal as a high school teacher and as a university professor is that every student in my classes should become a thinking, caring, literate human being and an active citizen who helps shape our community, society, and world. If this is unrealistic and undermines what is really important in education, I gladly plead guilty.

At an annual conference of the Hofstra New Teachers Network, Jennifer Palacio Quinn, at the time a

third-year teacher, told the group, “When I first started teaching, I tried to do all the things the exact way I learned them in methods classes and nothing worked. I thought I was a failure. When I began to discover my own ways to do these same things, I started to become a teacher. You cannot be someone else. You have to be you.”

This book does not offer a recipe for becoming a successful teacher. Instead it provides an approach to teaching and some suggestions on how to do it. But each of you will have to experiment with your own way of teaching as you teach to learn and learn to teach. We want you to join the conversation. We do not know any other way to become a teacher.

Are your university education professors lost in an ivy-covered tower? As you take this class, participate in field placements, and prepare to become a teacher, you need to answer this question yourself. What is the job of the teacher? As you come up with answers, please keep in touch. My e-mail address is catajs@hofstra.edu.

Sincerely,
Alan Singer

WHY I KNEAD THE BREAD

In 1987 I visited Paris, France, and fell in love with French-style bread. Every morning while I was there I raced out to a local bakery and purchased a baguette to eat for my breakfast. When I returned to the United States, I discovered that I could not find any comparable bread near where I lived, so I decided I had to learn how to bake. I experimented with different bread recipes and eventually merged the basic white bread recipe from James Beard's *Beard on Bread* (1987, pp. 22–35) with a French bread recipe from *The New York Times Cook Book* by Craig Claiborne (1961, p. 463). The recipe for my version of French baguettes is below. Over the years I have baked these baguettes with my children and grandchildren, as well as with children in local afterschool programs. Baking bread provides an excellent opportunity to teach children about measuring (math), the origin of different types of bread (social studies), and change of states (science) as the dough is transformed by the yeast from a wet gooey mass into an elastic ball that springs back when pressed. It also teaches patience and judgment as young bakers work the dough and add small additional amounts of flour until the final dough has the correct elasticity. And of course you produce a final product that you can enjoy with friends, classmates, and family members.

I have friends, who will go unnamed, who also learned to bake bread. Unlike me, many of them use kneading machines to prepare the dough for rising. “Je refuse” (French for “I refuse”). I enjoy the kneading. I find working the dough calming and it adds to my sense of ownership over the finished product.

I think of baking bread as a metaphor for all learning. Enjoyment of the process is at least as important as the quality of the end product. When our only goal is the end result, the test score, we destroy the joy of discovery and creation and we encourage students to seek shortcuts that do not benefit them in the long run.

Lesson Plan for Alan's French Bread

Ingredients

- 1 package (tablespoon) dry yeast
- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups warm water (body temperature)
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 4+ cups all-purpose flour (add a little more flour if the dough is too wet to work) oil spray for the baking pans
- 1 egg
- Sesame seeds or onion flakes

Materials

Music source, large mixing bowl, wooden spoon, measuring cups and spoons, wooden surface, baking pans, oven

Steps

1. Turn on music. I prefer rhythm and blues but this is your choice.
2. In the large mixing bowl, combine the yeast, warm water, sugar, and salt. Stir gently.
3. Stir in the flour one cup at a time and mix, preferably with a wooden spoon.
4. Place the mixture on a lightly floured board or table. Also lightly flour your hands, and begin to punch and knead the dough. Alternate pressing in with the heels of your hands and squeezing the dough between the fingers of both hands. In about ten minutes the dough will transform from a wet gooey mass/mess into an elastic ball.
5. Clean the mixing bowl, dry, and spray with oil. Place the dough in the bowl and cover with a kitchen towel or waxed paper. Put the bowl in a warm spot such as an unlit oven until it doubles in size. This takes about two hours.
6. Put the dough on your floured wooden board, punch it down, and give it a few more kneads. Place it in the bowl, cover, and put it in your warm spot for a second rise of about an hour.
7. Put the dough on your floured wooden board, punch it down again, and give it a few more kneads. Cut the ball of dough in half and roll each half into a snake about 2 inches in diameter. Place side by side on an oiled baking pan. I have pans that help the bread to keep its shape. Make a shallow cut along the length of the snakes with a serrated knife. Baste with water and allow to rise in your warm spot again for about an hour.
8. Remove dough from oven. Warm the oven to 425 degrees. Baste the "breads" with a beaten egg and sprinkle with the sesame seeds or onion flakes. Place the baking pans in the hot oven for 10 minutes and brush again with the egg or water. Lower the oven temperature to 375 degrees and bake for another half hour until the breads are golden brown. Another test is to tap the breads to see if they sound hollow.

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GOALS: WHY DO YOU WANT TO BE A TEACHER?

Traditionally, union organizers have used songs to encourage workers to join their ranks. Woody Guthrie, perhaps America's best-known labor minstrel, rewrote a religious hymn, "Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley" as "You Gotta Go Down and Join the Union." The point of Guthrie's song is that no one can make the decision to join a union for you. You have to make that decision for yourself. That advice holds true for teaching as well. Other people's ideas and experiences will only take you so far. You need to practice teaching, think about teaching, and talk about teaching for yourself. The idea that teachers have to continually evaluate what they are doing in their classrooms is called reflective practice. To help you develop the habit of reflective practice, sections in this book generally end with an activity that invites you to join the conversation and present your own ideas. Share your ideas with classmates in education classes and with other teachers. You will discover that you have much to offer your colleagues and it will make the process of becoming a teacher much more exciting.

Section A: The Challenge

A number of people helped to write this book, but the primary voice is mine—Alan Singer. When a piece is written by another author, it bears his or her name. Otherwise, although other people contributed ideas to help shape mine (or perhaps to confuse me), I take full responsibility for these ideas. In Yiddish, the language of my Eastern European Jewish ancestors, there is a word that I love— *ungapochka*. It means just the way it sounds; something is all “mushed” up together. If you find this book a little too *ungapochka* for your tastes, you only have me to blame.

I became a teacher and I am writing the second edition of this book, because I sincerely believe that if you like teaching it can be the greatest job in the world. I also know that if you dislike it, it is 30 years of purgatory until retirement. Let me warn you now—do not be surprised when you hear teachers who enjoy their profession advise pre-service teachers and beginners to steer clear of the faculty lounge.

The participants who put this book together are secondary school classroom teachers and university-based teacher educators. We want to begin by issuing you a challenge. Some of you may have seen the movie *The Faculty* (1998), in which a group of space invaders took over the bodies of high school teachers and tried to use this as a base of operations for conquering the world. One of the songs in the sound track was Pink Floyd's “Another Brick in the Wall (Part II),” which accuses teachers of trying to brainwash children so they fit in and support the status quo. During the song a group of elementary school-age children chant that they don't need no education, at least not the kind traditionally offered in schools.

Another movie, Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989), opens with Rosie Perez dancing to a song by Public Enemy, “Fight the Power.” In this song, the hip-hop group says they have no choice but to fight back against unjust authority that is intruding into their community.

This book is based on the premise that every teacher must make a decision: Will you “fight the power” or become “another brick in the wall” of an educational system that rewards some students, tracks many into limited options, and leaves others behind? In 1996, the Children's Defense Fund organized a march in Washington, D.C., and invited Americans to “Stand for Children” by working against inequality and injustice and by working for programs such as quality education for all children. Teachers cannot make all the difference in the world, but we can make a difference. In this book we are challenging you to become a teacher who stands up for children.

Chapter 1 introduces educational philosophies you should consider as you define your own teaching philosophy, and presents the thoughts of “new” teachers whom we believe “Stand for Children.” It concludes with excerpts from reflective journals written by two pre-service teachers who were taking their first education class and a summary of my own “pedagogical creed (beliefs about teaching).”

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Budget cuts. Strikes. Public debates. Curriculum revisions. High-stakes state and national tests. High-minded theories and the daily grind. Working with TEENAGERS.
2. Why do you want to be a secondary school teacher?
3. Why would anybody want to be a secondary school teacher?
4. How do secondary schools work? Do they work? Can they work? What did you like and dislike about your own school experiences?
5. Thirty years until retirement: Do I want to get involved in this? If I decide to give it a shot, what do I have to do to survive? To be good at it? To make a difference?

Question to Consider:

1. Why do I want to be a teacher?

Section B: How Do Your Beliefs about the World Shape Your Teaching?

Have you taken a philosophy course in college? Most of us usually think of philosophers as people who think deep thoughts about big ideas. The stereotype is that they are so preoccupied with their ideas that they are disconnected from the world around them and look and act a little weird.

Of course, there are other ways to think about philosophers and philosophy. In the movie *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the Scarecrow wanted a brain. In answer to his request, the Wizard gave him a degree in philosophy. I always find the scene funny, but there is a deeper message. In a sense, we are all philosophers. Everyone has a philosophy that gives direction to her or his beliefs and actions. The key is whether we think about it so that it becomes a conscious and considered aspect of our lives. You may not think about your philosophy, you may not even be aware of it, but you have one. Maybe it is something as simple (or as complicated) as the Judeo-Christian Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” or Frank Sinatra’s “I did it my way.”

Just as every individual has a philosophy of life, every teacher has a philosophy of education that shapes the way she or he looks at teaching. It includes their beliefs about life and the importance of learning, their goals, and their understanding of how to achieve them. Their philosophy includes views about “big ideas” such as democracy, equality, social justice, merit, a hierarchy of rewards, and the need for social structure and control, ideas that shape both our understanding of society in general and of education. In some areas, our beliefs are open to examination by ourselves and by others. At other times, they can be deeply hidden and we may not be conscious of them. But whether we are aware of them or not, we have beliefs that shape the way we think and act. This essay discusses the ideas of philosophers who were also educators. Their ideas may help you to clarify your own beliefs about the world and about teaching.

John Dewey's Philosophy of Education

John Dewey, one of the most important thinkers about education in U.S. history, made a list of his basic beliefs back in the 1890s. He called it his “pedagogic creed.” Dewey’s progressive educational philosophy was concerned with the need to educate people for life in a democratic society. Key concepts for Dewey were experience, freedom, community, and “habits of mind.” He believed that there was an “organic connection between education and experience,” that effective teachers are able to connect the subject matter to the existing experience of students, and that they can expand and enrich students’ lives with new experiences (Dewey, 1997a, p. 25).

According to Dewey, students learn from the full range of their experiences in school, not just the specific thing they are studying in class. They learn from what they are studying, how they are studying, who they are studying with, and how they are treated. In racially segregated or academically tracked classes, students learn that some people are better than others. In teacher-centered classrooms, they learn that some people possess knowledge and others passively receive it. When teachers have total control over classrooms, even when they are benevolent or entertaining, students learn to accept authoritarianism. During his career, Dewey continually reflected on the experiences educators need to create for students so they would become active participants in preserving and expanding government of, by, and for the people.

For Dewey, the exercise of freedom in democratic societies depends on education. He identifies freedom with “power to frame purposes” or achieve individual and social goals.

This kind of freedom requires a probing, critical, disciplined habit of mind. It includes intelligence, judgment, and self-control—qualities students may never acquire in classrooms where they are subject to external controls and are forced to remain silent. In progressive schools that use a Deweyan approach, students engage in long-term thematic group projects in which they learn to collectively solve problems; classrooms become democratic communities where “things gain meaning by being used in a shared experience or joint action” (Dewey, 1997a, p. 67; 1997b, p. 263).

Dewey believed that democratic movements for human liberation were necessary to achieve a fair distribution of political power and an “equitable system of human liberties.” However, criticisms have been raised about limitations in Deweyan approaches to education, especially the way they are practiced in many elite private schools. Frequently, these schools are racially, ethnically, and economically segregated, so efforts to develop classroom community ignore the spectrum of human difference and the continuing impact of society's attitudes about race, class, ethnicity, gender, social conflict, and inequality on teachers as well as students. In addition, because of pressure on students to achieve high academic scores, teachers maintain an undemocratic level of control when they arrange the classroom experiences of their students. Both of these issues are addressed by Paulo Freire, who calls on educators to aggressively challenge both injustice and unequal power arrangements in the classroom and society.

Paulo Freire's Philosophy of Education

Paulo Freire was born in Recife in northeastern Brazil, where his ideas about education developed in response to military dictatorship, enormous social inequality, and widespread adult illiteracy. As a result, his primary pedagogical goal is to provide the world's poor and oppressed with educational experiences that make it possible for them to take control over their own lives. Freire shares Dewey's desire to stimulate students to become “agents of curiosity” in a “quest for... the ‘why’ of things,” and his belief that education provides possibility and hope for the future of society. But he believes that these can only be achieved when students explicitly critique social injustice and actively organize to challenge oppression (Freire, 2004, pp. 105, 144; 2000, p. 28).

For Freire, education is a process of continuous group discussion that enables people to acquire collective knowledge they can use to change society. The role of the teacher includes asking questions that help students identify problems facing their community, working with students to discover ideas or create symbols that explain their life experiences, and encouraging analysis of prior experiences and of society as the basis for new academic understanding and social action.

In a Deweyan classroom, the teacher is an expert who is responsible for organizing experiences so that students learn content, social and academic skills, and an appreciation for democratic living. Freire is concerned that this arrangement reproduces the unequal power relationships that exist in society. In a Freirean classroom, everyone has a recognized area of expertise that includes, but is not limited to, understanding and explaining their own lives, and sharing this expertise becomes an essential element in the classroom curriculum. In these classrooms, teachers have their areas of expertise, but they are only one part of the

community. The responsibility for organizing experiences and struggling for social change belongs to the entire community; as groups exercise this responsibility, they are empowered to take control over their lives. Freire believes that there is a dynamic interactive relationship between increasing academic literacy and the desire to understand and change the world around us (Freire, 2004, p. 105; Kohl, 1995, p. 6).

Septima Clark's Philosophy of Education

Septima Clark probably never would have described herself as a philosopher. She was a teacher and a civil rights worker in the U.S. south during the 1950s and 1960s. In her autobiography, *Ready from Within* (Brown, 1990), she explained how she became an activist while working as a teacher in South Carolina. She sent a letter to Black colleagues asking them to protest a state policy that barred city or state employees from belonging to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Her thinking was that “if Whites could belong to the Ku Klux Klan, then surely Blacks could belong to the NAACP.” Even though she wrote more than 700 letters, only 26 teachers answered her. Clark later wrote that “I considered that one of the failures of my life because I think that I tried to push them into something that they weren't ready for. You always have to get the people with you. You can't just force them into things” (p. 37).

This experience played a crucial role in shaping Clark's approach to teaching, which was based on the idea that people had to be “ready from within.” She wrote: “I never once felt afraid, not on any of those marches. Bullets could have gotten me, but somehow or other they didn't. I felt very good about going, about talking to people. I knew that people had gotten to the place where they saw the type of meanness that was being shown throughout their little towns. They hadn't noticed it before, but now they were ready from within to do something about it” (p. 71).

One of the more powerful stories in her autobiography is her account of teaching reading and writing to adults so they could qualify to vote. “To teach reading I wrote their stories on the dry cleaner's (paper) bags, stories of their country right around them, where they walked to come to school, the things that grew around them, what they could see in the skies. They told them to me, and I wrote them on dry cleaner's bags and tacked them on the wall. From the fourth grade through the sixth grade they all did that same reading. But they needed that because it wasn't any use to do graded reading when they had not had any basic words at all” (p. 106).

Clark had no problem admitting that everything did not work. But she felt that her mistakes were key to her learning to be a successful teacher. “Many times there were failures. But we had to mull over those failures and work until we could get them ironed out. The only reason why I thought the Citizenship School Program was right was because when people went down to register and vote, they were able to register and vote. They received their registration certificate. Then I knew that what I did must have been right. But I didn't know it before. It was an experiment that I was trying... I couldn't be sure that the experiment was going to work. I don't think anybody can be sure. You just try and see if it's coming” (p. 126).

Other Educational Thinkers You Should Know

Most pre-service and beginning teachers are preoccupied with the mechanics of teaching practice (the “how to”) and tend to shy away from the “why.” In a focus group set up to discuss this chapter, a teacher education

student lamented that “every major theorist we look at has someone else who argues the exact opposite point.” A beginning teacher added that “these theorists live in a utopian world that is not the world where I teach. They are not evaluated on how well their students do on standardized tests.” Or as Melisa Baker, a former student teacher said, “I just don’t do the Dewey.”

Whatever your initial reservations about educational theory may be, I think you will gradually discover that the “why” of things, the reasons we do them, plays a significant role in shaping the things we decide to do as teachers. By the end of our discussion, Melisa conceded that maybe the reason she did not “do the Dewey” was because she is a “closet Freire.”

At this point I would like to briefly introduce other educational thinkers and researchers who have influenced my work as a teacher. During the course of your teacher education program and your career as a teacher, I hope you get to read some of the things they have written.

In 1932, during the midst of the Great Depression in the United States, George Counts (1978, pp. 3–4) of Teachers College at Columbia University issued a challenge to teachers and all of America: “Dare the School Build a New Social Order?” Counts believed that schools were “in the grip of conservative forces,” but that they could play a transformative role and help create a more just society. The key was whether educators would “pay the costs of leadership: to accept responsibility, to suffer calumny, to surrender security, to risk both reputation and future” in order to build the new social order. Maxine Greene (1993), another social activist, calls on teachers to unleash the “creative imagination” of their students. As a product of the turbulent “sixties,” I was eager to join Counts and Greene in this struggle.

But how do you change an institution that appears as monolithic and imposing as the school? Michael Apple (2004) offered a clue in his work exposing the “hidden curriculum.” Apple built on Dewey’s idea that students learn from the full range of their experiences in school, but he gave it his own twist. He argued that children did not simply learn the skills and information presented by teachers, but that they actually absorbed the values, practices, and injustices of society from the way schools and classrooms were organized and people were treated.

Whereas Apple helped me understand the nature of schools, people such as Howard Gardner (2006), Christine Sleeter (1996), Martin Haberman (1995), and Herbert Kohl (1995) gave me a better idea of what to do in the classroom. Gardner presented a theory of “multiple intelligences” that called on teachers to recognize and develop the full range of human potential. Sleeter offered an approach to multiculturalism that honored diversity and promoted social justice. Haberman systematically analyzed successful teaching. Kohl showed how to navigate the system and survive by utilizing “creative maladjustment.”

The problem still remained of connecting to students. Here, Nel Noddings (2005), Lisa Delpit (2006), and Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) were the greatest help. Noddings championed a feminist pedagogy based on caring and relationships. Delpit called on teachers to respect “other people’s children” instead of blaming them for problems in the classroom. Ladson-Billings argued for a “culturally relevant pedagogy” that linked instruction with the “context” of students’ lives.

At any rate, these are the people and ideas that were helpful to me. As you become a teacher, you have to decide which ones are useful to you. Maybe you will turn out to be a “closet Freire” as well.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—ARE YOU A PHILOSOPHER?

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you think of yourself as a philosopher? Explain.
2. Do you believe that teachers should be philosophers? Explain.
3. Are the ideas of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Septima Clark and their beliefs about the world and about education like yours? Explain.
4. Write an essay titled “My Pedagogic Creed” that explains your ideas about people, society, and the world and how these ideas influence your philosophy of education.

Section C: How Ideas Shape Our Teaching

One thing that I learned, and I suspect that you are starting to learn, is that simple questions can have very complicated answers. I prepared the following handout, “Which One Is English”, as part of a discussion over whether the dialectic spoken in inner-city Black communities should be considered slang, proper English, a different form of English, or an entirely different language. The question you need to consider is which one of the passages below is “English”?

Most people think of language as static, unchanging, like a photograph. But languages are probably more like movies, with images that continually change. New words are constantly being invented or borrowed from other languages. Even grammar evolves. Part of the debate over whether something is slang, a dialect, or a new language arises because some additions eventually become permanent whereas others are temporary and disappear. Another issue is over who gets to decide what is proper or standard usage.

Haitian Creole is a good example of how language evolves. It originated out of a blend of French and different African languages among Africans who were enslaved in Haiti. At first, most of the non-French words were considered slang. However, after independence and emancipation, Creole became established as the home dialect of the common people, with its own distinct grammar and spelling. In the second half of the twentieth century, Creole was accepted as an official language in Haiti. It is now taught in school and used in the workplace and government administration.

Significantly, although books and newspapers are now printed in Creole, Haitians who want to pursue higher education or to work in professions outside of Haiti must be multilingual. They are literate in their home language, Creole, plus standard French or English, or all of these languages.

In 1974, the National Council of Teachers of English approved the following resolution that supported diversity while students work to master “standard” English: “We affirm the student's right to their own patterns and varieties of language.... Dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another.”

I believe it should be possible to respect a student's home dialect or language, while still preparing them to read, write, and think in the “standard” dialect. Their home dialect adds poetic richness to our language and helps it evolve, while mastery of the standard dialect is necessary for advanced study, professional training, and participation in a broader exchange of ideas.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—WHICH ONE IS ENGLISH?

Questions to Consider:

1. In your opinion, which one of these passages should be considered English? Explain.
2. How does your response to this question shape the way you look at your students? Explain.
3. In your opinion, what should be a teacher's attitude toward a student who speaks "Black English" or any other home dialect in class? Explain.

Beowulf, Eighth-Century England

Heald pu nu, hruse, nu haeledð ne mostan, eorla æhte! Hwæt, hyt ær on ðe gode begeaton. Gup-deað fornarn, feorh-bealo frecne fyra gehwylcne leoda minra, para ðe pis lif ofgeaf, gesawon sele-dreamas.

The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer, England, 1386

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye
That sleepen al the night with open ye—

Hamlet by William Shakespeare, England, circa 1600

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: he hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! my gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar?

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain, Anglo-American, Rural Midwest, 1850s

You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another.

Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln, United States, 1863

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great

civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.

***The Gilded Six-Bits* by Zora Neale Hurston, African American, Rural Deep South, 1920s**

“Humph! Ah'm way behind time t'day! Joe gointer be head 'fore Ah git mah clothes on if Ah don't make haste....”

“Who dat chunkin' money in mah do'way... Nobody ain't gointer be chuckin' money at me and Ah not do 'em nothin'....”

“Ah ain't, Joe, not lessen you gwine gimme whateve' it is good you got in yo' pocket. Turn it go, Joe, do Ah'll tear yo' clothes....”

“Unhhunh! Ah got it. It 'tis so candy kisses. Ah knowed you had somethin for me in yo' clothes.”

Now Ah got to see whut's in every pocket you got.”

***Aunty Roachy Seh* by Louise Bennett, Jamaica, West Indies, Contemporary**

“So fi-we Jamaica Language is not no English Language corruption at all, a oh! An we no haffishame a it, like one gal did go a Englan go represent we Jamaican folk-song.

‘One shif me got’ as ‘De sole underwear garment I possess,’ and go sing ‘Mumma, Mumma, dem ketch Puppa’ as ‘Mother, Mother, they apprehended Farther!’”

Section D: Becoming a Teacher: Teachers Discuss Their Ideas and Experiences

According to a report by the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (September 1996), "New teachers are typically given the most challenging teaching assignments and left to sink or swim with little or no support. They are often placed in the most disadvantaged schools and assigned the most difficult-to-teach students.... Alone in their classrooms, without access to colleagues for problem solving or role modeling, discouragement can easily set in" (p. 39). As a result of conditions like these, almost a quarter of entering public school teachers leave teaching within the first three years (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). For urban districts the turnover is even greater because many young teachers leave for higher paying positions in surrounding suburban communities.

To help prepare new teachers for these difficult first years, the Hofstra University School of Education organized a New Teachers Network. Over the years it has evolved from a group of beginners that met on occasion into an online *listserv* for pre-service and student teachers as well as beginning and veteran teachers. If you wish to join our conversations, send Alan an email at catajs@hofstra.edu.

Most beginners in the Hofstra programs worry about content knowledge (will they know enough?) and teaching skills (how do you lead a certain activity?). Some of the younger students worry whether they are mature enough to become teachers and take responsibility for students and for a full-time job. I know I had all of those worries when I was 21. But from this vantage point in my career as a teacher, I think we are too concerned with information and mechanics. They will come with experience and a commitment to learn.

Based on my work with new teachers in the Hofstra New Teachers Network, I believe that the two most important qualities for becoming a successful teacher are the ability to empathize with your students and to have a personal sense of mission of broader social goals that you hope to achieve during your career. In the stories that follow, members of the network discuss their own philosophies of education and the sense of personal mission that helps them to be successful in the classroom. In a second group of essays in [Chapter 2](#) ("Responsibilities"), another group of teachers explain how they draw on their personal experience as students in order to help them empathize with the young people they work with. Additional personal stories by teachers are scattered throughout the text in sections labeled "Becoming a Teacher" and are posted online. For the second edition of this book, some of them have added a section called "Ten Years Later."

You will find that as a group these teachers are very diverse. What they share are their commitments to their students and to becoming excellent teachers. I have tried to tell you something about each teacher in a brief introduction (written in italics). As you read these stories by teachers in the New Teachers Network, consider your own ideas about teaching—your own philosophy of education. Ask yourself, how can your beliefs about students, teaching, schools, and society help you become a successful teacher?

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—ARE ANY OF THESE PEOPLE LIKE ME?

1. As you read the stories of these new teachers in the text and online, ask yourself, are any of these people like me? Which ones? How are their ideas like mine? How are they different?
2. What does it take to become a successful new teacher, especially if your initial assignment is working with students in urban and minority schools? What qualities do these teachers bring with them? What type of support do you think they need to sustain them in their work?

Questions to Consider:

1. Make a list of your beliefs about education.
2. Use your list to write an essay, “My Beliefs about Education and Society.”

Life Is a Series of Decisions

by Pablo Muriel

Pablo Muriel and I grew up in the same working-class neighborhood of The Bronx in New York City and attended some of the same public schools, although we are 30 years apart in age. I was once sharing an anecdote with a group of teachers about growing up poor. My mother had died and my father was working evenings and sometimes he forgot to set out food for our supper. My younger brother and I would eat pretzel rods dipped in mustard. Pablo laughed and said in his house they had pretzels for dinner but dipped them in mayonnaise. One of the things I like most about Pablo as a teacher is his commitment to exploring underlying ideas about the world and always learning himself. – Alan Singer

I think the most important advice I give to high school students and to beginning teachers is that life is a series of decisions. Listen to what people you respect have to say, but don't let them make the decisions for you. Ultimately you have to decide what makes the most sense for you.

My teaching story begins with a young Latino male growing up in a predominantly African American public housing project in the New York City borough of the Bronx. My mother had an eighth grade education. My father was forced to work in the sugar cane fields of Puerto Rico at the age of eight, so he only had a third grade education. My parents came to the mainland with hopes and dreams but unfortunately the lack of education and the language barrier (they only spoke Spanish) prevented them from realizing their dreams. My father taught me to drive at the age of six and my mother taught me to cook at the age of seven. This may seem unorthodox, but their intentions were noble. They were teaching me survival skills for the real world. I was sent to school every morning with the hope that I would be the first in our family to graduate from high school.

My attendance in elementary school was horrible, but fortunately this caught the attention of a very special teacher named Ms. Rogoff. She took an interest in me and decided to be my mentor. During the next four years in primary school she taught me to read, write, and develop a love for learning. While in middle school I continued to visit her to seek advice. She recommended I choose a high school based on something I was interested in and that I try to get into a school outside of the Bronx so that I could experience new things.

I followed her advice and applied to Aviation High School because airplanes fascinated me and because it was in the borough of Queens. Going to Aviation High School was the best decision I ever made in my life. At Aviation, I was surrounded by people from all over the world. Their cultures fascinated me. I began to make friends, ask questions, and enjoy learning. One friend was from India and when I visited his home he asked me to remove my shoes. He explained that it was a rule in his home because of their culture and I decided to adopt that rule at my own home. At Aviation I met a girl from Colombia who became my girlfriend and is now my fiancé. She taught me about her culture and amazingly I learned to dance the salsa.

The vocational focus at Aviation High School was aircraft maintenance. While I dreamed of learning to fly, I figured why not learn to fix planes so I could make a living. While in high school I held an assortment of jobs in the airline industry. I was not the most adored student in the school because I always spoke what was on my mind and many teachers did not appreciate this. However, after five years of high school and completing a series of examinations, I graduated with a high school diploma and licenses permitting me to fix aircraft.

I wanted to attend college, but I had to work. Because my mother's health was declining, I found a school near a major airport where I could work but not too far away so I could commute home on the weekends. While a full-time student working on my associate's degree, I worked as a baggage handler and finally as an airline mechanic helping to fix 747 Boeing Jumbo Jets. I was so enthusiastic that sometimes I would remain at work for 18 hours in order to learn as much as I could about the aircraft. After three months I was promoted from helper to full mechanic and a month after that I was given the title of flight mechanic, which gave me the opportunity to travel.

I completed my associate's degree in May 1998 but felt I had not learned enough. I applied to Hofstra University because of its proximity to the airport and its high academic standing. I negotiated a deal with my supervisor where I was scheduled just for weekend flights. This gave me the ability to do the work I loved, finish school, and keep an eye on my mother.

At Hofstra University, I met Dr. Alan Singer, the second most extraordinary person that I have ever met. The first question he asked me was, "What do you want to do?" I said, "learn history." He asked if I ever considered teaching as an option. When I replied, "not really," he suggested I take a secondary education class as an elective. That decision was the second best decision I made in my life.

For the next two years I continued to work as a mechanic from 11 pm until 7 am, attended classes from 9 am until 3 pm, rushed to the Bronx to see my mother, slept for four hours, and then did it all over again. I would meet with Dr. Singer twice a week after class to complete whatever work I was missing. The more time I spent with Dr. Singer the more I began to look at the world differently. While my original goal was just a personal one, simply to escape poverty, I began to think about the possibility of fighting to end poverty and injustice.

My new ideas along with my natural proclivities soon got me in trouble. I was let go from my first aircraft mechanic job for trying to unionize my co-workers. The bright side was that getting terminated allowed me to student teach, which further fueled my passion for

education. Dr. Singer suggested, and I agreed, that I be placed in a high school with a high concentration of poor and minority students, most of whom were Black, either African American or from Caribbean families. At that point I decided that I would be a teacher and I would teach in a high poverty school. After completing my undergraduate degree and certification, I chose to return “home” and work in an alternative high school located on the campus of Bronx Community College, not far from the housing project where I grew up.

At University Heights I met another individual whom I hold in high esteem not only for her intelligence but also for her dedication to the school and community. Dr. Bravo, the school's principal, allowed me the freedom to teach and learn at my own pace while Dr. Singer continued to help me with the curriculum and lesson planning.

My yearning to bring more to my students prompted me to return to Hofstra to earn a master's degree and better my pedagogy. Unfortunately, during my last semester my mother passed away. I got a lot of support from my students, my girlfriend, Dr. Singer, and Dr. Bravo, who all cheered me on.

After completing the Master's degree, I decided to involve my students in a political fight with the local elected officials, pressuring them through a letter writing campaign to find the money to rebuild our school. After numerous meetings with state legislators and the Bronx borough president, the students secured enough funds for the school to build a new library, chemistry lab, several classrooms, and an auditorium. At the same time I became the union chapter leader and was selected for a prestigious program at the City University of New York that would eventually lead to a supervisory position. Unfortunately, the program offered less than I expected. I did not feel challenged or that the material being presented could be applied in the classroom to enhance student learning.

These initial activities led me to make other decisions. I guess I am a compulsive activist and a compulsive student. Following our first successful political action, I helped students in my government class launch a new campaign against school closings and forced relocations in New York City. This became a citywide drive, and although they were not always successful in stopping an autocratic mayor and a rubber-stamp education department, the students were incredibly impressive. Through their organizing, speaking, blogging, and use of “YouTube,” they became well-educated leaders with tremendous potential for the future and I became immensely proud of their achievements. Their actions inspired me to go back to school again, to earn a doctorate, so I could learn more about teaching and our world and make more of a difference in the struggles against poverty and inequality. A side benefit of this decision is that I got to work with Alan Singer again. As I continue to study and learn, hopefully I can contribute to the enhancement of education and life in the urban setting and serve as a role model for the many students who believe they can't. My goal is to prove that they can.

Teacher and Adventurer

by Amanda Ahern

Amanda Ahern grew up in suburban New York. After majoring in history and sociology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus, she returned home to get a degree in secondary education social studies at Hofstra University. She is a natural adventurer. While many of her classmates in the secondary education program worked as leave replacements and substitute teachers, Amanda went to Great Britain, where she taught in public and private schools in England and Scotland and starting working on her doctorate at the University of Manchester. Both of Amanda's parents are special education teachers. — Alan Singer

I became a teacher because it felt natural to do so. There were expectations when I was growing up that I would ultimately choose teaching as my career. For many years I ran from this prospect, but after graduating from college I decided to embrace teaching and my love of working with students. My parents, who are both teachers, were a tremendous help in preparing me for life as a teacher. I was lucky to be able to use them as examples.

When I was a student in high school, I was inspired to study history by a historian whose text we used to present the “liberal” approach to history. In *A People's History to the United States of America*, Howard Zinn focuses on the experiences of ordinary people as they struggle to build a better life against very difficult conditions. Instead of just introducing students to the Pilgrims, he examined the plight of Native Americans whose lives were affected by these newcomers. If this alternative story is classified as liberal, then I gladly accept the label. Zinn inspired me to teach about the histories of all people, not just those considered the “winners.”

My decision to attend a School of Education and earn a Master's degree and certification immediately after completing my Bachelor's degree at the University of Massachusetts was actually heavily influenced by the problem of keeping medical insurance in the United States. Originally I planned to take a few years off from school and join the Peace Corps. Unfortunately, at the end of my senior year in college I found out I had a cyst in my spinal column. Left untreated, it would have worsened and I would have suffered from complications for the rest of my life. At the time I was covered under my parents' health insurance plan. Under the plan, I was covered until the age of 25 as long as I remained a full-time student without an interruption. To pay for the surgery, I had to stay in school.

I took a month off from classes for the operation and recovery and returned as quickly as I could. Student teaching was the most memorable part of the certification program. My mentors were inspirational teachers who had graduated from the same program I attended and taught the way we had learned to teach in our classes.

As a history major, I was fascinated by the stories of the past, especially stories about Great Britain because its history is so much longer than that of the United States. I wanted to see Hadrian's Wall, which was the northern border of the Roman Empire, and unearth remnants of medieval battles, castles, and towns. Because of these interests, I decided to live, teach, and continue my education in the United Kingdom (UK).

My students there are as varied as they were in the schools where I student taught in suburban New York. I worked in a boarding school with students who were predominantly from Germany and China and in a suburb of Manchester with children from working-class families who were the descendants of the coal miners who helped inaugurate the Industrial Revolution. The main difference is that in the UK I have no defined grade level. I am a history teacher rather than an elementary, middle, or high school teacher so I get to teach students on many different academic levels. When I started out I would go from teaching a year seven class about medieval England including topics on the Norman conquest, the Bayeux tapestry, and the differences between castles to a sixth form class where I taught the intricacies of the Cold War with students who would be high school juniors and seniors in the United States. On a typical day I would teach four different grade levels four entirely different topics. While this was a lot of work, I loved the variety of subjects and the chance to learn more about British history. I still am not as expert in British history as I was in American history, but that is fine because what I am really teaching is to be inquisitive, analytical, and how to engage with past events.

The most important lesson that I have learned from my students is to never underestimate them. Students who seem disengaged can quickly become some of the most active and interested students in a lesson. They are far more able and adept at handling whatever we throw at them than we give them credit for. I used to worry that they may not understand abstract connections or be able to handle complex topics. Unless you give them the opportunity to try, even if it means they fail at something, you will never know what they are capable of, and more importantly, they will never know what they are capable of.

My biggest surprises as a beginning teacher were how much time it takes to prepare a simple 40-minute lesson and the politics that go on both inside schools and in society about the schools. My biggest disappointment continues to be my inability to reach all of my students. I see their potential and sometimes they just do not see it in themselves.

Beginning teachers have to remember that they cannot possibly know everything about their subject area at the start of teaching, so they

| should not pretend to know. If you are honest and open with your students, and with yourself, students will respect you. |

Additional Online Stories about Becoming a Teacher

Stories by these teachers are online at <http://www.routledge.com/cw/singer-9780415534604>. Howard Fuchs, Gayle Meinkes-Lumia, and Michael Pezone have added post-scripts with new insights into teaching for this edition of *Teaching to Learn*.

Christina Agosti-Dircks grew up in an affluent suburban community and attended an Ivy League college as an undergraduate. Her parents are Italian immigrants, and the family is Roman Catholic and deeply religious. In her early twenties, after a year in the secondary education program, Christina spent two weeks as an intern in an urban high school. Based on this experience, she accepted a position as a special education teacher working with students who were labeled emotionally disturbed. Her family, friends, and several of her classmates tried to discourage her with “horror stories of young, naive women facing dangerous situations.” However, Christina not only decided to work in “the city,” she moved into an apartment not far from the school.

Howard Fuchs grew up in a religious Jewish family in a White, upper middle-class suburban community. Until eighth grade, he went to a private Jewish day school. After graduating from high school, he attended a small private liberal arts college. When he completed college, his parents expected him to become a lawyer. Instead, he decided to teach high school.

Pedro Sierra is a social studies teacher and the dean of students in a troubled inner-city high school. His parents were originally from Puerto Rico. He grew up in the neighborhood near the school, but earned his high school diploma from an alternative educational program. Pedro attended a suburban college where he earned his teacher education credentials and was exposed to a level of affluence and comfort he had never imagined. Even though he worked hard to get out of the ghetto, Pedro decided to return to this community to teach, live, and raise a family. He feels he “spent years tearing down my community. Now I dedicate the rest of my life to making it a better place. It is my calling. This is why I am here.”

Gayle Meinkes-Lumia grew up in a middle-class, predominately White neighborhood of New York City, but attended a public high school where the students were overwhelmingly Latino/a, African American, and Caribbean American. Among the students in her high school, she was one of a tiny fraction who were Jews. Gayle was a student in my high school class. We met again when she began her teacher education program. She teaches English in a suburban middle school with students who are primarily Latino/a. She is convinced that “the transformation of society must begin in our schools. Teachers have to motivate, encourage, coddle, and connect. Our own lives were touched by people who cared; it is our obligation to care about others.”

Michael Pezone has taught junior high school and high school in New York City. He is a White male, from a working-class Italian American family, who grew up in a suburban community with people from similar backgrounds. He attended an Ivy League college, worked in the corporate world, and, in his mid-thirties, decided to start a second career as a secondary school teacher. A political radical and an intellectual, he was dissatisfied with the academic level and ideological limitations of most of the students and professors in the teacher education program he attended. Because of his political beliefs, he chose to student teach in a predominately minority suburban school district. After a series of unsuccessful job interviews, he opted for a teaching position in “the city.” In the last few years he has completed a Ph.D. in Education, where he focused

on improving student performance in secondary school by engaging them in dialogues about historical and contemporary issues.

Deon Gordon Mitchell was born in a rural community on the island of Jamaica in the Caribbean. She was raised by her grandparents until she joined her mother in New York City when she was 14 years old. Deon is a high school teacher and deeply committed to her Pentecostal Church. She works with the church youth group and writes articles for its newsletter discussing the importance of education. Deon believes that with God by her side “my life is filled with hope and love.” She teaches young people in school and in church “to fill their lives with hope and love.”

Section E: First-Semester Education Students Reflect on Their Experience

Alice Van Tassell and Maritza Perez were students in the same graduate secondary education methods class for pre-service teachers. It was their first class in the Hofstra University teacher education program. In reflective practice journals they wrote during the semester, Alice and Maritza discussed their feelings and ideas as they tried to decide if they really wanted to be teachers. As you read about their experiences, think about your own ideas, concerns, and hopes as you prepare to become a teacher. — Alan Singer

My Secondary Education General Methods Reflective Practice Journal

by Alice Van Tassell

Excerpt A: A humbling experience

Tonight we discussed our personal experience in high school, how it still shapes the way we see ourselves, and how it influences our ideas about teaching. I was surprised at how many people described negative experiences and talked about the way they learned to see themselves as failures. Two women, Maritza and Irene, said they felt stupid in high school and they continued to feel that way for a long time after they graduated. Alan (our teacher) asked us to think about whether the failure people described was because of their inadequacies or failure by teachers and schools.

My own high school experience was primarily positive, very different from the ones described by Maritza and Irene. I am starting to realize that this was largely due to the excellent teachers with whom I was fortunate enough to come into contact. I remember many different types of teachers, but the ones that made the most lasting impression on me were less concerned with the subject matter than they were with helping us learn to think and develop life skills. My advanced placement calculus teacher always broke up the classroom with jokes and told stories of his previous job with NASA where he learned to apply calculus. His down-to-earth manner and constant interaction with us made calculus accessible to me. I was someone who had begged and pleaded to be taken out of advanced math only a few years earlier.

Tonight's class was a humbling experience for me. In the past, I always believed that my academic success was due solely to my intelligence and effort. Now, I see that things could have been very different if I had gone to an average school with average teachers, or even worse, a school where teachers didn't care. No matter how intelligent I may (or may not) be, I owe a lot of credit to teachers who always tried to teach us in creative ways.

Excerpt B: Mike's Total Rejection of 'The System' Is Very Disconcerting to Me

Tonight's class was very heated. Our class argued about topics that are politically relevant to education and the country as a whole. Mike, a New York City teacher, visited our class, and he was very angry. He said that the American educational system institutionalizes racism, oppression and failure and he expressed disgust with mainstream America. Hector, a philosophy major, presented a diametrically opposed viewpoint. He believes that poverty and oppression are no excuse for educational failure. He feels people will be successful if they have strong family and academic values.

I think Mike and Hector are both wrong. Hector should realize that the phrase "family values" is a political slogan. Some conservatives want to impose their ideas on other people and many feel this is oppressive. As an English major, I read August Wilson's play *Fences* and Robert Pirsig's novel *Lila*. Hector should read these books. They would help him re-evaluate his opinion.

On the other hand, Mike's total rejection of 'the system' is very disconcerting to me. While I do see a need for change, I believe that such an absolutist position is counterproductive to his goals. In my opinion, change will have to come from within, especially with an issue which is as politically charged as education.

Personally, I feel family values are very important and I want to instill them in my children. But I recognize that there is something wrong with blaming the problems of education on the values of students. I don't know yet how I will handle this issue as a teacher. The only thing that I do know is that there is more than one side to this question.

Excerpt C: What Struck Me ... Was Alan's Use of Humor

Tonight we spent about half of the class with Alan demonstrating mini-lessons in four different subject areas: physics, math, English, and music. It was very interesting for me because I got to see different ways to help students think about the main goal of the lesson. In each case the specific content area came second to the goal of getting us involved in the discussion.

What also struck me as very interesting was Alan's use of humor. I don't remember classes in high school being so much fun. I also don't remember being taught concepts like "duality" in science or "equality" in math. Important concepts like these were usually reserved for English classes—which may be part of the reason I chose to be an English major. I find lessons that engage students in discussion of the big issues by presenting smaller examples for examination are the most interesting. I suspect other people do, too.

The props Alan used in class (like passing melting ice around the class to illustrate the duality of being) were very creative. "Is water a solid, a liquid, or a gas?" The liveliness that the props added to the lesson helped keep me interested in what was going on and helped me better understand the concepts being introduced. Later when we evaluated the mini-lessons, we compared the props to the metaphors in a poem.

Excerpt D: I Thought I Was Prepared Before I Got Up

Tonight we started doing our own mini-lessons with the class. One of the math students went first and he did very well. I was actually

interested in what he was teaching. After his lesson we discussed ways to connect math to the lives of students so it is not taught in a vacuum. We also spoke about the idea of multiple intelligences. Different students can look at the same problem and think about it in different ways.

Then it was my turn. I thought I was prepared before I got up, but in retrospect, I don't feel I was. I had a good idea, but I didn't get it across clearly at all. I also found myself standing behind the desk too much and not connecting with the "students." Part of the problem was that I was very nervous, much more than I had expected to be.

After the mini-lesson, the entire class discussed how it went. At first, I was upset with the criticism, but very quickly I realized that I need it in order to improve. We discussed ways to make the lesson better, and then I got a chance to do the same lesson again. I was happy that Alan and the class didn't feel my ego was too fragile for them to openly raise their questions and that I got to do my lesson a second time in front of the class. Next time, I will work on laying out my plan better and will try to have everything clearer in my head.

Excerpt E: I Was Getting Rebellious ... Pretending to Be Her Student

Tonight we worked on writing lesson plans. They are our strategies for teaching. We started looking at a two-week-long unit, broke it down into daily lessons, and then broke the lessons down into shorter activities and questions. The idea of starting with a broad picture and then finding smaller building blocks we can use to convey understanding to students seems very logical and should help me to plan my lessons. I feel that better organization is one thing that will make a big difference in my next presentation to a class.

I want to comment on some of the mini-lessons people did in class tonight. Donnie was great. She spoke slowly and clearly and I never once had that uneasy feeling I get when I'm not sure where a lesson is going. However, the next mini-lesson made me feel like I was in sixth grade again. The teacher spoke clearly and made her points, but I would have been afraid of her as a student. During the fifteen-minute mini-lesson, I was getting rebellious sitting in my chair pretending to be her student. I used to think I wanted to be the kind of teacher students respected with an ounce of fear. But I am starting to see that this isn't necessarily the most effective way to teach.

Excerpt F: The Saying That You Learn as You Teach Was Very True for All of Us

We started class by examining a research project done with students at a California state university. Evidently, Asian students were consistently getting higher grades in freshman Calculus than students from other ethnic groups. After observing students during the semester, researchers concluded that the reason for this disparity in performance was not the intelligence of particular students or the amount of time they studied, but because the Asian students were more likely to work outside of class in unofficial study teams. Other studies have found that group work can facilitate learning at all ages and academic levels.

This does not mean that if teachers put children into groups they will automatically become better students. We discussed ways that teachers can design groups to make them work more effectively. All team members should have clearly defined responsibilities. Teachers should be active participants in each group, advising, stimulating, and monitoring the performance of students where necessary.

The class worked through a cooperative learning activity using an old high school algebra final exam. Each team had people who were comfortable with math, people who were just okay, and people who were terrorized by math problems. Our goal was to prepare a student who has "math phobia" to teach a problem to the rest of the class. The key to the activity was that we had to help the person who did not understand math, not only to understand, but also to explain the problem to the class. The saying that you learn as you teach was very true for all of us.

At first, I thought this kind of group activity wouldn't work very well. When I was put in a group in high school, I found the "smart person," and I just floated along. But the ideas of clearly defined responsibilities and of teacher-as-active-participant have potential and I can see myself getting enthusiastic about cooperative learning.

I also like the idea of having teams work on a term project. This type of long-term activity teaches students how to work together, how to plan their time, and how to organize their thoughts. Group term projects will allow students with different talents to contribute to them and make everyone's work better.

Excerpt G: I Need to Strike a Balance

As an opening exercise, we worked in groups writing questions to ask students about a reading passage. I hadn't realized how hard it would be to come up with good questions. After each group presented their questions to the class, we examined our questions using a system called Bloom's Taxonomy. Bloom organizes questions into a hierarchy ranging from simple, recall questions, to questions requiring comparisons, conclusions, and complex thinking. Personally, I like the structure Bloom provided for thinking about questioning, but some people were concerned that teachers who applied his formula could become rigid and only ask "higher order" questions. We also had difficulty deciding on the differences between some of his categories. It might be more useful to locate questions on a continuum instead of placing them in distinct categories. Certain questions will have the tendency to draw thoughtful responses, even though they don't initially seem that sophisticated. Alan says his most important question is "Why?"

My second mini-lesson went much better than the first one. I prepared more questions and was more relaxed with the topic. Because my first mini-lesson was somewhat dull, I tried to make this one more exciting and the class got a little rowdy. I see that I need to strike a balance between the two and keep the discussion a little more civilized. I was also speaking too fast and cutting people off before they could finish presenting an idea. These are both nervous habits that I have to address before student teaching. Anyway, I worked hard and people felt that I improved.

Excerpt H: Many Students Feel that Your Grade Defines You.

Tonight we discussed grading students in high school and also how we would be graded for this class. People raised good points and things came up that I hadn't considered before. I feel that grading is a negative part of our educational environment, but it is so intricately woven into the "system" that I have trouble envisioning schools without grades. Someone in class said that grading helps a teacher see who is doing well and who needs help to improve. I said I think it is unfair to label students as doing "better" or "worse." It seems like stereotyping people and tracking them in another way.

Alan introduced the idea of mastery learning. Instead of having students compete against each other for grades, students have to demonstrate that they have achieved a mastery level of material and skills. Success is measured by competence. This is an interesting idea because it leaves open the possibility that everyone will do well and get a high grade. It also fits in well with the ideas of cooperative learning. Students will have a cooperative classroom environment because they are not competing for grades.

We also discussed another option for grading called *portfolio assessment*. In this system, students present their work to a panel. I think this offers students a chance to really show what they know. Marking is done by a panel so there will be greater objectivity. However, I confess that the idea of going before a panel is very intimidating to me. I wonder what kind of an effect it would have on certain students. Someone who is outspoken will feel comfortable and may even be able to disagree with the panel. But a student who has been brought up to "toe-the-line" and respect and fear authority may not be able to breathe until later.

One thing that bothered me was Alan's statement when we were talking about grades for this class. He said, "A grade is just a grade. It measures performance on a task but it does not say anything about your qualities as a human being." Many of us, including myself, feel that your grade defines who you are. For Alan's statement to be correct, it needs to be incorporated into the philosophy of the school. It cannot just be rhetoric to make students feel better at report card time.

My Secondary Education General Methods Reflective Practice Journal

by Maritza Perez

Excerpt A: My First Day of Class in Ten Years

Today was my first day of class in ten years and I am doubting myself. I don't know if I made the right decision in going back to school. I don't know if I really want to be a teacher or if I would be a good one. I work in an art program for second- to fifth-grade children. An experience I had there explains why I am here now.

My second graders were designing patterns so they could make bracelets. As I was speaking to the class, I noticed one little boy was not doing the project. I went to help him, but the teacher said I should not waste my time because he never listens and is not smart. She felt he should be put back into the first grade.

I got the class started on the project and I went to talk with him anyway. I asked him why he wasn't working, and another boy told me that he didn't understand English, "He is Spanish." I bent down and in Spanish I asked him if we could do the project together. While I explained things to him in Spanish, the other children were whispering to each other, "She speaks Spanish." When Carlos completed his bracelet, it was one of the best in the class and he was very proud. I knew that for at least one class I had helped a child feel important and confident. That is why I am in the teacher education program.

Our teacher asked if any of us did not like high school and I raised my hand. I told the class my story of being the only Spanish-speaking student. I did not think I was smart enough to do the work, so I went into the vocational program and became a beautician. Alan said something interesting to me. He asked, "Why are you still blaming that 15-year-old girl for all the problems she had in high school?" I never really thought about it before. Maybe if some teachers had taken an interest in me, things would have turned out differently. Maybe, someday, I will be that teacher and I can make a difference in life for a teenager that is lost.

Excerpt B: I'm Going Home

We were asked to read this paper and write a paragraph about what it means. I began to read the article but I didn't understand it. There

was a lot of noise in the classroom and I couldn't focus. I sat in my seat not knowing what to do because I was so upset. I complained to myself and then I came to a conclusion—I don't have what it takes to get my Masters and I'm going home. I decided to talk with Alan after class and tell him why I couldn't do the assignment. Just then, Alan asked who didn't understand the reading. I raised my hand. I told him it was too hard, and I just was not as smart as the rest of the class. After I spoke, others began to open up. To my surprise, only two people in the class understood the article. The conversation started to change now. This is how students feel in school when the teacher tells them to read something that they don't understand. I have felt and struggled with this feeling all my school life. I was running away from this feeling when I became a beautician. When we looked at the article together as a class, I discovered two things. If you feel you have support from other people, you can confront the unknown and work it out. There are also different ways of teaching the same subject matter. It can be boring and oppressive, or it can be interesting and even fun. A teacher needs to remember the students and use appropriate lessons to teach them. Don't go over their heads.

Excerpt C: It Really Doesn't Look Right When the Teacher Chews Gum

Today, five students did mini-lessons. For many of the students in our class it was the first time they were in front of a group teaching, and some had a hard time. They lost the class in the middle of the lesson and could not figure out how to follow through and bring their mini-lesson to a conclusion. I learned some important points from what they did. 1. I have to keep focused. 2. Don't sit and point at the board. 3. Things go better when you are organized. 4. Be direct and ask lots of questions. 5. You have to understand what you are teaching. 6. Try to look confident. 7. It really doesn't look right when the teacher chews gum.

Excerpt D: You Have to Be in Charge

The people who did mini-lessons today clearly learned from the first group, and they did much better. Today I learned: 1. If you are nervous, it shows. Try to keep calm. 2. Don't be so rigid. Go with what works. 3. Participation from students is essential. It lets you know if they understand the lesson. 4. When students participate they get motivated to learn more. 5. Use different materials to make the lesson more interesting. 6. Do not assume students know what you are talking about. You have to explain things to them. 7. Try to limit the number of things that are not related to the subject. 8. Body language is important. Watch out for the signals you are giving the students. 9. If you are the teacher, you have to be in charge.

Excerpt E: I Understood the Concept

The first half of the class we were doing some sample math problems. I hadn't done anything like this for several years and I didn't remember how to do them. When we finished—or gave up—Alan divided the class into groups. We would review the problems, and then someone who had trouble with the math would teach the problem to the entire class. In my group it was going to be me.

The people in my group tried real hard to help me but I still wasn't getting it and I panicked. Alan came over to see what was happening. He sat down and took off his shoe. It was silly, but we started to all compare our shoes and now I understood the concept.

When I went up to the front, I explained to the class about congruent shoes and congruent triangles. When Alan took off his shoe he caught my attention, it got me to relax, and I was able to learn and teach the math. In the second half of the class we watched and discussed a video with a math teacher who found all sorts of ways to get her class into the lesson. She allows them to build, cut, play games, and she sings and dances, whatever it takes to motivate students and explain the concepts. Sometimes the more ridiculous you are, the more interested students become. I think I am starting to understand just a little bit of what math is all about.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—REFLECTING ON YOUR EXPERIENCE

Questions to Consider:

1. Which of the experiences described in this section comes closest to your own as a student? Explain.
2. Alice and many of the students in this class were very concerned about being graded and assigning grades to their own students. How do you feel about being graded? Why?
3. Maritza lists things she learned from watching student-taught mini-lessons in class. What did you learn from your first mini-lesson?
4. Write a letter to either Alice or Maritza comparing your experiences as students and in teacher education classes with theirs.

Section F: Alan's Pedagogical Creed—What I Know About Teaching and Learning (with Apologies to John Dewey)

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed John Dewey's "pedagogic creed," in which he listed his basic beliefs about education. In bringing this chapter to a close, I would like to list some of my basic beliefs. Most of Dewey's writing was heavily philosophical. However, in his pedagogic creed, he was much more concrete and practical. The ideas I present here are also intended to be concrete and practical, but as with Dewey, they are grounded in my broader philosophy of education and society, my experience working with students, and my goals as a teacher.

I am not calling the list a pedagogic creed because I think my ideas are on par with Dewey's. I am simply borrowing his approach and using it as a way to honor him for his seminal contributions to education.

Table 1.1 Alan's Pedagogic Creed

<i>This does not work:</i>	<i>This works:</i>
Drill Kills: This approach to teaching (drilling basic skills) is based on the assumption that students either did not understand something because they were not paying attention or because they are too stupid to think. If we make them do it over and over again, they will learn through repetition or to avoid punishment. The approach seems to work for certain physical skills (shooting baskets, marching, or hitting tennis balls) and practice does make people more proficient as musicians and artists (but probably not if they experience it as punishment), but there is no evidence that drilling helps people understand complex ideas. On the other hand, constant drilling destroys enthusiasm and interest in learning. Drill kills.	Engaged Learning: Imagine a world, or just a classroom, where people love to learn. A world where learning is exciting, where students are constantly exploring and trying to figure things out. Look at a baby and see how it engages its world, sorting things out, searching for patterns, seeing what goes together, and learning what to avoid. If one word could summarize the way young children learn, it would be curiosity. Instead of destroying it, teachers need to nurture curiosity and direct it so that students become engaged learners.
Bore Snore: Boring teaching is a form of social control, not a necessary evil in conveying information. Its goal is to beat students into submission so that they will behave. Boring instruction is a pretense at education, allowing school officials to say, we taught it but they didnt learn it therefore the problem must be them.	Standards Are Goals: Because I said so or It is on the test are the last phrases of desperation used by parents and teachers when all else fails and they want their directives followed IMMEDIATELY. Why can't standards be flexible, targets to achieve, but not at a precise time or in a specified fashion? Maybe classrooms can have enough room so that students can make choices about how they will learn something.
Repeat Defeat: Extended school day. Summer	Constructing Metaphors: Everybody does not

snore em. If at first it didnt succeed, do it the same way again. Can you imagine a general or a football coach who employed this strategy? They wouldnt last very long. This is a form of punishment, not an approach to teaching.

Fact Attack: If you say it fast fact attack the words almost rhyme. The myth behind fact attack is that somehow, if we present students with mountains of detail, cram it all in and threaten them with a test, it will all be absorbed. In chemistry, when a suspension is supersaturated, particles precipitate out at the same rate at which they are absorbed, with no net gain. The liquid just cant hold any more. In classrooms, most kids just give up. The others memorize data for the test and then trash it as quickly as possible.

Control Patrol: Hall patrols. In-house detention. Bathroom passes. Five points off. Threatening calls home. Pile on the work. Give them another quiz. Test, test, test. Post the rules, recite, copy, and memorize them. Sign the rules. Your mother signs the rules. Rules, rules, rules, and more rules. And if you break the rules, WHAM!

One size does not fi t all. Teaching means helping students discover or create their own meaning or metaphors. All human understanding is a product of making connections between old ideas and new ones constructing personal metaphors.

Reading and Writing Are Like Talking: Children learn to talk because they are surrounded by language. They discover that words have an agreed-on meaning and they can interact with others if they use the right ones. Of course we get better with practice, but we learn language by listening and talking. Children learn to read and write the same way, by being immersed in an environment where people use the written word to communicate. In learning environments where they are surrounded by printed material, where adults and older children model how to do it, and where children have a chance to practice, they learn to read and write. In fact, all meaningful learning takes place this way.

Classroom Community: A place where everyone learns and students care about and take responsibility for each other. Rules are designed to help the community function more effectively and achieve its goals, so community members help to establish the rules and remind each other why they are important.

My motto: You do not have to know this for the test. You need to know this for life.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—YOUR PEDAGOGICAL CREED

Questions to Consider:

1. Which of these statements do you agree with? Which do you disagree with? Why?
2. Compose your own list of your basic beliefs about education based on your experience in school, your ideas, and your goals.

Online I have included two essays that support this chapter. The first, *Mary Kennedy Carter—A Lifetime of Activism* (E1), honors a colleague and friend who taught all over the world, learned as she traveled, and brought her experiences back to American classrooms. The second, *Teachers as Crap Detectors and the Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility* (E2), expands on my educational philosophy and introduces you to an important educational reform group that provides outstanding curriculum material.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Teachers who want to learn more about the ideas of John Dewey should read *Experience and Education* and *Democracy and Education*. Highly recommended books by Paulo Freire are *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Pedagogy of Hope*. I especially enjoyed a dialogue between Paulo Freire and Myles Horton in *We Make The Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990). Septima Clark's story is told in Cynthia Brown, ed., *Ready from Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement*.

I think the following books will also be useful to you as you define your own philosophy of education and translate it into classroom practice. George Counts's *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* is difficult to find, but excerpts appear in a number of collections. Maxine Greene has written many books including *The Dialect of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988). I especially recommend an article, "Diversity and Inclusion: Towards a Curriculum for Human Beings," in *Teachers College Record*, 95 (2), 211–221, 1993. Michael Apple is the author of *Ideology and Curriculum*, 3rd ed. Howard Gardner presents his ideas in *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice*. Christine Sleeter has also written a number of books and articles. I find *Multicultural Education as Social Activism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996) is particularly accessible to readers. Martin Haberman's *Star Teachers of Children in Poverty* is a short book with many challenging ideas.

Herbert Kohl explains his approach to teaching in *I Won't Learn from You and Other Thoughts on Creative Maladjustment*. George Wood and Debbie Meier write about schools using similar approaches in Wood, *Schools that Work* (New York: Plume, 1993) and Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem* (Boston: Beacon, 2002). Among Nel Noddings's many writings is *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, 2nd ed. Lisa Delpit is best known for *Other People's Children*. Gloria Ladson-Billings is the author of *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, 2nd ed. The newspaper, *Rethinking Schools*, and the essays from the newspaper that have been collected in book form, are especially valuable. They can be ordered from their website, <http://www.rethinkingschools.org/>.

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2

RESPONSIBILITIES: WHAT IS A TEACHER?

During my first three years of teaching, my lessons were largely hit or miss. Sometimes it seemed like I had the entire class in the palm of my hand and I could do no wrong. On other days, the students acted like I was not even present. But the worst part was that I could not predict when lessons would work or why. I read a book called *The Last Unicorn* by Peter Beagle (1968) and I found it captured the way I felt about my teaching. It is the story of a hapless young magician who is trying to save unicorns from extinction. Sometimes he finds that he has great magical powers, but then, inexplicably, the magic is gone. The magician eventually realizes that humans cannot control magic. It only comes when there is a great need. During those years, I frequently felt that I was that hapless magician. I was always hoping for the magical lesson, but I never knew when it would appear.

As I learned how to teach, I realized that experience brought increased skill, better judgment, and greater knowledge. There was no magic formula, only practice and hard work. I now believe that it takes between three and five years of classroom teaching experience before you learn how to teach—and that does not include teacher education courses or student teaching. When you finish these programs, you are a certified beginner, but that is all.

As you might suspect, I am not a big fan of rapid preparation programs such as Teach for America (but of course if they want to use this book they can). Unless the people who run those programs have discovered a magic potion that eluded me, or the students they turn into teachers are just much more talented than I was, the programs will not have a major impact on schools and teaching. In fact, because it only requires a two-year commitment from participants, most of the people recruited by Teach for America are little more than “accidental tourists” who leave the profession just when they are really learning how to be effective teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1994, 2000, 2005).

This chapter examines the “job of the teacher” from different perspectives. In a section titled “My Best Teachers,” I introduce a friend who helped me figure out how to become a teacher by modeling his own idiosyncratic approach. The “Becoming a Teacher” section focuses on childhood experiences of teachers that have helped them define the “job of the teacher” for themselves. The chapter concludes with autobiographical sketches by two veteran teachers who explain how they learned to teach.

In addition, in response to my much delayed understanding about what it requires to be a teacher, this chapter and [Chapter 5](#) include “Nuts and Bolts of Teaching” activities designed to demystify the mechanics of teaching. Remember, you only get better if you work at it. Think of teaching as lifting weights. If you start by

pressing 100 pounds and work at it diligently, you will build muscle mass while increasing the number of your “reps” and the weight you can comfortably lift.

Section A: My Best Teachers: Directed Experience, Scaffolding, and Creative Maladjustment

Some of my best teachers did not consider themselves teachers at all. I did not meet them in schools and I was already an adult when our paths crossed. My experience with these teachers reinforces the idea that teaching and learning go on all the time and in all places, but also that certain conditions make teaching more effective.

According to John Dewey, the key to effective teaching is directing classroom experience so that students are able to achieve educational goals. When learners use their understanding of these experiences to build on what they already know, they are able to construct new meaning or knowledge. Lev Vygotsky called this process *scaffolding*.

The experiences I describe in this section took place in a summer sleep-away camp located in the Catskill Mountains of New York State. Camp Hurley was sponsored by the United Community Centers, a community center in Brooklyn, New York. I worked at Camp Hurley during the summer between the ages of 19 and 24. It is here, as a result of my directed experience and scaffolding, that I learned how to be a teacher.

My best teacher at Camp Hurley was a man named Jerry Harris. When we first met in 1969, Jerry was in his early 50s, a World War II veteran who had spent most of his working life as a machinist making tools and parts out of metal. I was a college student, a novice and unskilled community volunteer who joined Jerry and other women and men on work weekends as we prepared the camp for the summer.

Jerry was kind of gruff and irascible. Though he was not interested in being buddy-buddy with the younger volunteers, he definitely enjoyed working with us. What Jerry did best was demystify tools and help us become problem solvers by creating directed experiences and building on our prior knowledge.

Lesson #1. Keep your cool. Analyze the problem. Find a solution. The younger volunteers, especially college students caught up in the political activism of the “sixties,” had a tendency to glorify work and place skilled workers like Jerry on a pedestal. We considered their skills as nearly magical, rather than things that could be learned. Jerry let us watch him as he worked as long as we did not disturb him. If we were especially attentive, he let us try our hand at the task and work with him. He also supervised us in our initial efforts to use a tool before he sent us off to work on a cabin somewhere out in the woods. Once, one of the drivers lost the keys to our school bus. Most of us were on the verge of panicking. Jerry, with my minimal assistance but avid attention, proceeded to rewire it, bypassing the ignition switch so we could drive it home.

Lesson #2. If you work hard, you can learn to do the job. Jerry taught us that tools were for performing tasks, not totems to be worshipped; they were to be respected but not feared, and they could be used safely and skillfully if we cared to learn. Under his tutelage, I learned to use a chainsaw to cut up a fallen tree, to use hydraulic jacks to lift a cabin so we could replace rotten foundation supports, and to locate a plumbing problem, dismantle the system, and reconnect and solder joints.

Lesson #3. Don't be afraid to bend the tools or the rules. Jerry believed that technical solutions had to be within the limitations of tools, the environment, our skills, and money available for materials. He valued what he could do, and he understood what he could not. He continually reminded us that we were repairing cabins and plumbing, not creating art. Once the director of the camp discovered

a bent screwdriver, and he wanted to know who had broken it. A bunch of us started to laugh, and we told him to look at the screwdriver again. It had been bent at a right angle and fashioned into a new tool, used to work in narrow places. The only member of the crew resourceful enough to turn one tool in to another was Jerry.

Lesson #4. Explanations cannot substitute for hands-on experience. Jerry stressed that we were not learning skills for the sake of mastering a skill, but to help us solve problems in the real world of work. Camp Hurley stretched for more than 120 very hilly acres. Jerry could not be everywhere and he could not give us detailed instructions to fit every situation in advance. Generally, he stayed at our centrally located tool shed where we could come and discuss a project with him and get needed tools, materials, and advice. But we had to come to him with a plan, a strategy for solving our problem. We had to know what our tools could do, we had to understand the materials, and we had to figure out what was broken and how to fix it. Although he would discuss it with us, he insisted that he had already taught us how to work through repeated modeling, so we should be able to solve the problem. Hard work, skill, and understanding, not magic, were required.

Lesson #5. Don't be afraid to do something you believe is right. In later years, I was continually reminded of Jerry when I read books about teaching. For example, in one passage in his book *The Pedagogy of Hope* (2004), Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, described the detailed, but frequently unappreciated, knowledge of skilled Chilean agricultural workers. Freire reported on a conversation where the workers insisted on deferring to his expertise because they felt that they had nothing to offer a man of his learning. Freire challenged them to a contest where he and they would take turns asking each other questions aimed at stumping their opponent. After a few rounds it became clear to all of the participants that the knowledge of the agricultural workers was different from, but not inferior to, the knowledge of the college professor. Jerry had similar knowledge to these workers, knowledge based on careful consideration of years of experience. It was knowledge vital for understanding the world and solving problems.

One reason that Jerry and I tended to get along was that we were both usually impatient with authority. In fact, I think Jerry independently discovered the concept “creative maladjustment” that Herbert Kohl describes in his book, *I Won't Learn From You and Other Thoughts on Creative Maladjustment* (1994). Kohl argues that effective teachers, especially teachers working with inner-city disenfranchised youth, have to learn how to break arbitrary or oppressive rules and get away with it. They need to find ways to manipulate the system in order to protect their students from injustice, create safe places for learning, and design lessons that connect with student lives and motivate them to learn.

My best example of Jerry's “creative maladjustment” to what he perceived of as irrational rules happened when we needed a six-foot length of one inch by two inches (1×2) pine board to fix a window screen. I rummaged around the woodshed but could only find a large enough piece of 1×2 oak, intended for flooring, which was considerably more expensive per foot than pine board. Jerry told me to use the oak to repair the window, but I hesitated, concerned that the camp's director would not be happy when he discovered what I had done. Jerry looked at me as if I were from another planet. He said our time was worth more than a piece of wood and that it would cost more to go to town to buy pine than either the pine or oak was worth. He

proceeded to cover the oak board with a coat of white paint. Then he handed me the camouflaged board, still dripping with paint, and sent me to go fix the window screen. Covered with paint, it made no difference whether it was a pine or oak board and no one could tell.

The lessons I learned from Jerry about work and his approach to solving problems have helped me in every project I have undertaken as a student, worker, and teacher.

1. Learning skills make sense when you are doing real projects. You learn best when you have a reason to learn.
2. Whether it is a hammer, an idea, or an approach to teaching, you have to know how to use your tools.
3. Experience, particularly directed experience, is the best teacher.
4. Reflect on and value your experiences; they are the basis for knowing.
5. Do not depend on memorized formulas.
6. Step back from a problem. Think about what you are doing. Figure out how to solve it.
7. Do not be afraid to do what you know is right.
8. Remember, the solution is there, if you learn how to see it.

Because of what I learned from Jerry and my other “best teachers,” this is a “why to” rather than a “how to” book. I believe that teachers, and most people, will figure out much of the “how” as they think about and try to apply the “why.”

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—CREATIVE MALADJUSTMENT

Mahmoud Elder, a student in the social studies education program at Hofstra University, was disturbed by this essay because he felt it encourages teachers to break rules and challenge authority. He is concerned that if teachers break rules, students will feel justified in breaking them also and the result will be chaotic.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is your attitude toward obeying and breaking the rules? Explain.
2. How do you view Jerry's approach to teaching? Why?

Section B: Nuts and Bolts of Teaching: Introducing the U.S. Army Air Corps Manual

To help us examine the mechanics of teaching, I want to introduce you to a guide developed by the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II. At the start of the war, the United States not only had a severe shortage of mechanics, it had an even greater shortage of people who could teach other people how to be mechanics. The Air Corps Technical Schools developed a guide for vocational teaching (Air Corps Technical Schools, Vocational Teaching (Temporary), M-26, Department of Mechanics, April 9, 1942) that is clear, easy to follow, hands-on, student-centered, and, I think, still useful today. I want to thank Eric Simons, a former student, who discovered it among his family's artifacts.

Although many of its ideas remain fresh, there is language in the document that is antiquated, especially when it refers to gender. The manual clearly would be different if it were designed for use by the contemporary U.S. military. In the section that follows, while the manual originally said “he must know,” I substitute “teachers must know.”

Defining Teaching

Essentially, teaching is the process of assisting other people to learn the things you already know. A simple definition of teaching follows: Teaching is helping learners to acquire new knowledge or skills. Teaching consists, mainly, of telling, showing, guiding the learner in performance tasks and then measuring the results. Whenever you have shown someone how to do something; such as kicking a football, or pitching a curve, or fixing a flat, you have been teaching. The success of the Air Corps in fulfilling its mission, like your success, depends upon the success of the graduates from your classes.

Responsibilities of the Teacher

1. Teachers must know thoroughly the subject they are to teach. Teachers must be able to separate the nonessential content from the whole subject.
2. Teachers must look at the course from the learner's point of view. They must put themselves in the other fellow's place and ask whether the instruction is getting across. A teacher must show students the “how” and the “why” of each operation, tell them what to look for, or what to do at each step. This means analyzing step-by-step what the teacher does so easily and then explaining each step to the students. Teachers must also see that students continue in the correct way until they have mastered the operation.
3. Teachers must know what results to expect as standard performance of the job.
4. Teachers should develop to the utmost their skill as instructors. Teachers must present work clearly, set high standards and have students meet them, at the same time maintaining a cheerful, sympathetic attitude toward the class and arousing in them an interest in the job and real enthusiasm for it. “Without enthusiasm,” said Emerson, “nothing great was ever accomplished.” An interested, enthusiastic instructor who knows the subject will generally have students who are interested and engaged in purposeful activity.

Professional Traits of the Teacher

1. Mastery of your subject is necessary. You can teach others only what you know yourself. You must do more than know your subject, however. You must so vitalize it by tying it up with the experiences, the needs, and the problems of your students that its importance will be clear to them. The successful instructor's knowledge of the subject must be far broader than any text being used. A teacher reads widely and continues studying to keep abreast of the latest developments in the subject and allied fields. In a word, a teacher is both thorough and up-to-date in his or her knowledge of the subject. A teacher maintains a professional attitude toward the work.
2. Executive ability is required to manage the affairs of the class in a businesslike fashion. This involves detailed planning of the course, the securing and distribution of supplies and equipment, the keeping of records, the reduction of waste, the adjustments of the program to the needs of students, the making of reports, and the examination and rating of students.
3. Most important of all is skill in teaching. The instructor must develop the knack of "getting a lesson across to a class," to give students new knowledge, understanding, and skills, new insight into what was unclear before, new power to use such knowledge and abilities as they already have to do the old jobs better or the new jobs well. This is a task calling for the utmost in personal industry and resourcefulness, but it is a task that brings profound satisfaction. A knowledge of the principles and facts underlying the science of teaching is not enough. One must have, also, the ability or the art to apply this knowledge in teaching a subject to a class.

Selections from the Air Corps teachers' manual. (Adapted from Air Corps Technical Schools Teachers' Manual, April 9, 1942)

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—DEFINING GOOD TEACHING

Questions to Consider:

1. How do you define teaching? Explain your definition.
2. The Air Corps Manual lists four responsibilities for teachers: content knowledge, ability to place yourself in the position of the learner, an understanding of standards or expected performance outcomes, and skill as an instructor. Do you agree with this list? How might you alter the list or the explanations? Explain.
3. How would you rate these responsibilities in order of importance? Why?
4. According to the manual, teachers have three key “professional traits”: subject mastery, executive ability, and skill in teaching. Do you agree with this list? How might you alter the list or the explanations? Explain.
5. How would you rate these traits in order of importance? Why?
6. Select a teacher (from the past or present) whom you really respect. What makes him or her a good teacher? What “professional traits” does he or she exhibit? How?

Some of the pre-service teachers and teachers who helped with this book had vocational training in high school, in the military, or in industry. Many felt that vocational training, when done well, prepared them for later learning and for becoming teachers. Chris Caponi was not a “great student” in high school and college because he was put off from learning by teachers who lectured. In his mid-twenties, he went to work for the telephone company where he attended “cable college,” a five-day intensive “hands-on” training led by seasoned veterans. Chris feels his negative experiences in school and his positive experience in “cable college” shaped the kind of teacher he has become.

Steve took vocational classes in high school, where learning to use tools also taught him how to think and solve problems. Steve discovered that “Being a mechanic was about solving problems, not simply following instructions.” He still believes “People learn best by doing and the most important learning is figuring out how to solve problems.” More extended comments by Chris and Steve on the value of vocational learning are online (C2a).

Section C: Becoming a Teacher: Teachers Discuss Their Personal Experiences as Students

Did you like middle school and high school? Why or why not? What did you like? What did you dislike? Do you think everyone in your classes felt the same way you did? Were some individuals or groups favored? Stereotyped? Victimized? Alienated? Who was responsible? Could anything have been done to change their experiences? Not everyone has the same experience in school, even when they attend the same one. I have a colleague who went to the same high school as I did, though a couple of years earlier. She remembers our high school as a place where there was excitement about learning and where teachers were connected to their students. I remember it as a place of alienation and oppression, where my relationship was with a small group of friends who felt little connection with the school or the teachers. Same school, similar people, different experiences, and very different memories; can we both be right?

If you have ever seen the Japanese movie *Rashomon* (1951) or the American movie *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), read the novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1993) by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, or heard different “eyewitnesses” describe an accident, you understand how people can experience and describe the same high school in such different ways. Part of the reason for different memories is that people filter what they see through all of the other things that are going on in their lives; part of the reason is because our experiences and our perspectives are just not the same. Memories are so complex because our lives are different and complicated.

Many people decide they want to become teachers because they liked school, a teacher, or a particular subject and really would like to return. Often they are unaware that not everyone shared their experiences and that, at least at the beginning of their careers, they will probably be teaching students who are not doing well and do not want to be there. When I interview prospective applicants to the secondary education program at Hofstra, I often ask them, “What subject in high school did you like the least? How could you have reached ‘you’ in that class?” That is because most of their students will feel about the applicant's favorite subject the way the applicant felt in the class where they did not understand what was going on, and they were sure that the teacher did not care if they learned or even attended.

As you read these stories about teachers in the New Teachers Network, consider your own background—your own story. Ask yourself: How can your experience help you become a successful teacher?

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—REMEMBERING OUR OWN EXPERIENCES

Stacey Cotten “was the kind of student who did just enough to get by.” Jennifer Bambino “hated teachers because they were controlling.” Danica Liriano learned to value the little things. Susan Soitiriades was “once in their shoes.” Lynda Costello-Herrera remembers being called “spic.” Stephanie Hunte remembers when “I was the new kid and I was scared.” Other new teachers have spoken about being placed in special education classes because of learning disabilities, having eating disorders as adolescents, or being tracked into slow classes because they were second-language learners.

Questions to Consider:

1. Which of the school experiences described in this section is most like yours? Whose experience was most different? Explain.
2. Make two lists. a) What I liked about secondary school. b) What I did not like about secondary school. How would your current list differ from a list you would have made as a teenager? Why?
3. Write a biographical essay, “How My Experiences as a Student Will Shape My Work as a Teacher.”

A Student Who Did Just Enough to Get By

by Stacey Cotten

Stacey Cotten is an African American young woman who earned her teaching certification as an undergraduate and later returned to Hofstra University for her master's degree. She was born and raised in a working-class, largely minority, suburb of New York City. When she was interviewed for this chapter originally Stacey said she believed her decision to become a teacher was a good decision, but she still had reservations. For this edition of Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach, Stacey reflected on her experience during a decade of teaching.—Alan Singer

Although I grew up in the suburbs outside of New York City, I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth. My mother was a single parent who worked extremely hard as a housekeeper in a local hotel and always stressed the importance of education. In the public schools I attended as a child, the student population was mostly African American (like me), a dwindling White population, and a fast-growing Latino and Caribbean population.

In high school I was the kind of student who did just enough to get by. It may seem funny but this behavior has tremendously influenced me now as a teacher. Most of the kids that I work with are just like I was. They do just enough to get by, settling for a 75 or 80. They really know how to work the system! They do not do every homework assignment but maybe every other assignment. They talk with their friends in class, but they do not talk too much so they stay out of trouble. Every now and then they raise their hand—just enough to keep the teacher off their case.

I usually can pick out when one of my students is going through the motions. I go over and talk to them and say, “You need to do more! A 75 is a good grade, but it is unacceptable because we both know that you can do better.” I try to encourage them to push out 100% effort.

The African American kids in my classes like to see an African American teacher, especially someone like me who is relatively close to them in age. They cling to me. A lot of the African American kids hang out in my room when they have lunch or a free period. I make sure my room is a comfortable space and open to everyone. Other kids who may not be my students come and hang out as well, though not as regularly.

I like teaching but I just wish I knew the content the way the experienced teachers do. Things just roll off the top of their heads. Nothing rolls off the top of mine. I have to sit, organize myself, put it all together, and then I have to teach it! Sometimes I feel like there is so much that I do not know. Even when I know something, I cannot always figure out why this topic is so important to teach. I worry; if I do not understand, how will my students? It gets weird sometimes and I feel like I should not be teaching. These are the battles that are going on inside of me, and I go back and forth. But then one of my students confides in me, we make a connection, and I figure out what is bothering him/her when nobody else can and, I know, these kids need me. The role of the teacher is not just being knowledgeable in the subject area but being able to connect to the students as well.

For me, the key to successful teaching is making a personal connection with every student. If my classes are too large, I cannot make it around the room to help everybody during the period. Instead of talking to my students, I become intimidated by the class size and I just lose control. I end up trying to keep them quiet by giving them a lot of work but they really do not understand the material. They need a more intimate setting so we can make connections. That is the kind of teacher I needed as a teenager and the kind of teacher I want to be with my students.

Ten Years Later and Sixteen Years as a Teacher

I have been teaching now for 16 years. As I read over my original piece I cannot believe that young green teacher was me! Although it is slightly embarrassing, I love this piece because it is my true raw emotions of a beginning and struggling teacher. Fresh out of college, my first year of teaching was an eye opener. Although I majored in history, my focus was U.S. history and I was assigned to teach global history. To be honest, I was clueless! At that point, I did not know the difference between Indonesia and Malaysia. I spent endless hours preparing for each lesson. I was literally one step ahead of the students, sometimes only one chapter. I constantly questioned myself.

I knew I loved working with the students, but was I doing them a disservice? Those questions would finally

cease when I got my Regents scores at the end of my first year and my students actually did well! What really put my mind at ease was seeing that my scores were comparable to the more seasoned teachers in my department.

Today I am pleased to say that I am that master teacher that I longed to be 16 years ago. In the past 16 years I have earned two Master's degrees, several certifications in education, and I am currently working on my doctorate. I finally learned the standard curriculum and I have now written several curriculum additions of my own that were implemented when we re-structured the social studies program at my high school. I currently use my original autobiographical piece to challenge my student teachers when they are struggling. Their reactions are all the same: "I cannot believe that was you!"

I have been fortunate enough to teach students from different socioeconomic backgrounds as well as various race and ethnic groups. That experience has taught me that all parents want the same things for their children, including a quality education. My advice to new teachers is to keep that idea in the forefront of your mind, don't be afraid to ask questions, don't be afraid to ask for help, and never give up.

I Hated Teachers Who Were Controlling

by Jennifer Bambino

Jennifer Bambino is a White, Italian American, young woman who earned her teaching certification as an undergraduate. She grew up and attended public school in an overwhelmingly White, middle-income, suburban community. In high school, Jennifer hung out with a rough working-class crowd. She hated teachers because they were controlling. She believes that if she had a teacher like herself when she was in high school, it would have saved her from some of the pain she went through as a teenager. Jennifer student taught in the predominately African American suburban school district where she is now a middle school social studies teacher. To her surprise, she discovered that the adolescent turmoil and alienation from school that some of her students experienced was amazingly like her own when she was their age.—Alan Singer

I chose to teach minority students because I can relate to where some of them are. I still remember an eighth-grade girl I spoke with briefly while waiting in a principal's office to be interviewed for my first job. The girl was crying. She was accused of threatening another girl and was suspected of carrying a razor blade in her mouth. The young girl had problems at home. Her parents were both dead and she was living with her grandmother. She sounded as if she had no one at home she could talk to and just needed some attention. She reminded me of how I felt sometimes when I was 13. My friends and family think I took that job because I wanted to save kids. Honestly, on my first day, I thought I would save all 180 of them. On my second day, I hoped I would be able to get through to at least one.

The most important job of a teacher is to understand and relate to the kids. You have to be able to reach them first so they can really learn what you expect them to. You cannot order them to learn, but you can motivate them to seek success. Kids want to be in my room. Students who rebel against other teachers behave with me. Some of my students need nurturing and I provide an environment to help them feel they matter. I set high expectations for my students, and may seem demanding at times, but I am also very caring. One of the most rewarding benefits of my job is the wonderful things that they share with me through their work and through class discussions.

Sometimes my educational philosophy brings me into conflict with other teachers. A teacher barged into my classroom with a student from my homeroom class. She was trying to embarrass him by yelling at him in front of my class. She had thrown him off a field trip and asked the kids in my class if anyone wanted to buy his ticket for the trip. When she left, I took him outside and asked what happened. He told me that he fooled around in her class because he could not understand the work. She did not explain it very well to the class. They just copied notes off of the board while she yelled and screamed. Field trips are fundamental to learning, especially for the students that I had in my classes. I believed his story and decided to fight to get him back on the trip. I was sick of this teacher verbally abusing kids.

When I evaluate my work as a teacher, I always ask myself, "Am I bored?" If I am, chances are that my students are bored as well. To keep my middle school classes interesting, my students are assigned many individual and group projects, and I am always amazed by what they create. I am also using portfolio assessment with some of my classes to keep the kids motivated. It is important for students to reflect on their progress throughout the year.

Additional Online Stories About Becoming a Teacher

Stories by Danica Liriano, Susan Soitiriades Poulus, Lynda Costello-Herrera, Stephanie Hunte, and Jayne O'Neill are online at <http://www.routledge.com/cw/singer-9780415534604>. Danica Liriano grew up in a suburban New York community and attended an ethnically segregated high school where nearly all of the students were Black and Hispanic. She then attended a nearby segregated suburban college, however, this time nearly all of the students were White. Her mother is an immigrant from El Salvador. Her father was born in the United States of Dominican ancestry. Neither of her parents went to school beyond high school and both parents have always held working-class jobs. Danica reports her parents had her while they were quite young and eventually had two more children. Growing up, the family did not have much material wealth. Her parents taught her to value the little things and to strive to achieve more in school and life. She teaches at a charter high school in an inner-city community in Brooklyn, New York.

Susan Soitiriades Poulus is a Greek American whose family spoke Greek at home. She grew up and attended public school in an ethnically diverse section of New York City. As a teacher, Susan continually

thinks about her own experiences as an adolescent and a student. She earned her teacher certification as an undergraduate.

Lynda Costello-Herrera grew up in an affluent White suburb. She was raised and identifies as an Italian American, although her biological father was Puerto Rican. After student teaching as part of a Masters degree program, she was hired by a suburban junior high school that is over 90 percent African American and Caribbean. She is glad she was given the opportunity to teach in the school where she teaches and is quick to challenge people who she feels are demeaning her students because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds. During the past decade she has earned a doctorate in educational administration, become a parent, relocated to Virginia, and become a teacher educator.

Stephanie Hunte is an African American woman of Caribbean ancestry. Both of her parents were immigrants from Barbados. Stephanie was born in New York City and grew up and started school in a largely West Indian community. She earned her teacher certification as a graduate student. She currently works and teaches in Georgia, where she is also working on a doctoral degree.

To look at her today, Jayne O'Neill is a typical young, harried, White, suburban mother, working hard to both raise her family and continue her teaching career and education. What keeps her going is her memories of being a poor child of immigrant parents who was shunted aside in school because she could not speak English. Her high school students in Paterson, New Jersey, are largely from non-English speaking immigrant families.

Section D: Second-Career Teachers Who Make a Big Difference in the Lives of Their Students

A lot of people choose professions or jobs out of economic necessity, under pressure from family, or because they misjudged what they really want to do. I got my teaching certification as an undergraduate student in the 1960s as a back-up plan because I wanted to be involved in movements for social change but really did not know how I would make a living. In this section you will meet second-career teachers who have made major contributions to the lives of their students after spending decades doing other things and working in other fields. I was fortunate to meet each of them as they tried to figure out what new steps they wanted to take in their lives.

According to a survey by the National Center for Educational Statistics, in 2007–08 there were over 3.4 million K-12 public school teachers in the United States including 201,000 “new entrants.” Of the new teachers, 54,000, or 27 percent, were considered as “delayed entrants,” more commonly known as second-career teachers. Some went to college after years in the workforce, some delayed professional careers because they were involved in childcare, and others shifted to new careers after early, not necessarily voluntary, “retirement” (*New York Times*, Sept. 16, 2011).

Martin Haberman, professor of education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Education, who died in 2012, was a strong advocate for the hiring of mature second-career teachers, especially by troubled urban school systems where large percentages of the student population lived in poverty. Haberman believed 20- to 25-year-old men and women were simply not mature enough to effectively run an adolescent classroom. He wanted teacher education programs to concentrate their efforts on recruiting and training people over the age of 30

According to Haberman, mature adults are more likely to possess the qualities of effective classroom teachers and more likely to remain teaching in difficult schools. Although few people have all of the qualities he cited, the more they have, the better prepared they would be to teach. The personal qualities that Haberman felt supported effective teachers in inner-city schools included that teaching candidates be familiar with the metropolitan area where they were seeking a position; are parents or have had life experiences that included extensive relationships with children from diverse backgrounds; were members of a minority group or from a working-class background; were part of a community in which teaching is regarded as a fairly high-status career; have experienced living in poverty themselves; earned a Bachelor's degree from a non-elite college; have had extensive and varied work experiences before deciding to become teachers; and can do several things simultaneously and for extended periods, such as parenting and working. Haberman also valued military experience. Significantly, these are almost the exact opposite of the qualities valued by alternative certification programs such as Teach for America (NCATCI, Feb. 28, 2005). Some of the more active members of the Hofstra New Teachers Network are second-career teachers who bring years of other experience to teaching. Many were very concerned when they entered the teacher education program that their age would prevent them from securing a teaching position. I advised them that districts would be smart to hire them. They get years of real-world experience without having to pay for it.

For this section, I invited a group of second-career teachers to share their experience prior to teaching, on entering the profession, and during their first few years. Their comments and advice will have special meaning

to other “older” people who are considering becoming teachers, but I believe they are meaningful for everyone.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—SECOND-CAREER TEACHERS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES

Questions to Consider:

1. As you read these stories, ask yourself, what, if anything, can I learn from their experiences prior to teaching and as new teachers?
2. Write a letter to one or all of the second-career teachers with your reactions to their stories. If you email the letter to me at catajs@hofstra.edu, I will forward it to them.

Exploring Many Worlds

by Vance Gillenwater

Vance Gillenwater turned to teaching after more than 20 years in the business world and as a musician. He teaches in an inner-city high school and possesses many of the personal qualities highly regarded by Martin Haberman. As a college student in the early and mid-1980s, Vance was much more concerned with performing with the University of Southern California's internationally recognized marching band than he was with academics. When we first met him in fall 2004, I was unable to accept him into the Hofstra Secondary Education Master's and certification programs because of his low grades as an undergraduate student. I laid out a vigorous remedial program that he would have to complete before being matriculated and, honestly, I did not expect to see him again. The following summer Vance returned with a transcript from a local community college where he had completed all of the requisite courses with a perfect 4.0 grade point average. Vance's academic excellence, which he continued to demonstrate as a student in the teacher education program, shows how people change and mature and how they are capable of surprising accomplishments. During the last 10 years Vance and I have become friends as well as colleagues and have collaborated on a number of occasions. From Vance I have learned to greatly appreciate the experience and understanding that second-career teachers bring to our schools, as well as the importance of offering people, both adults and children, numerous second chances.—Alan Singer

I was born in San Francisco in 1961 and spent my formative years there. Like President Obama, I am bi-racial. My father, an engineer, is Black. My mother, a nurse, is White. When I was 14 we moved to a suburb of Los Angeles. I also spent large chunks of my childhood in the South with my grandparents, primarily with my mother's family in West Virginia and occasionally southern Virginia with my father's family. My great-grandfather on my father's side was the son of an emancipated slave. He was a sharecropper in Virginia with 13 children. My grandfather was one of the oldest.

In 1973, my grandfather's younger brother, Charles Gillenwater, wrote a letter to the extended family describing what life was like growing up as sharecroppers for him and his 12 brothers and sisters. Their father was born just 10 years after Emancipation and for him it was a hard life with little hope for advancement. Young Black men in his generation faced great dangers and hardships in the South, especially if they showed talent and tried to improve their position in the world. They worked as "beasts of burden," were treated as less than human by Southern society, and they were severely punished if they defied social conventions in any way.

Despite this restrictive environment and the need to work at an early age to help support the family, six of my grandfather's siblings attended community colleges operated by the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions. Ward, my grandfather, was accepted at the Tuskegee Institute, a historically Black college, but could not attend because the family needed him to work. Educated Blacks had few career options in those days, so most of Ward and Charles' brothers and sisters became teachers or preachers. Although Ward never had the opportunity to attend college, he made sure that his two sons, my father and uncle, did. This made it possible for both of them to escape from the racially segregated agricultural South.

My parents met in 1957 in Abingdon, Virginia, while my mother was attending nursing school and my father was an engineering student at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, another historically Black school. They decided to marry in 1958, but since mixed-race marriages were illegal in both Virginia and North Carolina, they married in Brooklyn, New York. After that they moved to San Francisco, one of the few places at the time that a mixed-race couple could live without a great deal of issue. There my mother worked as a nurse, my father finished his engineering degree at UC Berkeley, and my sister Sheli and I were born. Their marriage lasted until I was six, and after that my sister and I were raised by my dad, a single Black man. However, we spent most summers in West Virginia with my mother and my grandparents.

When my parents' marriage ended, I initially moved to West Virginia with my mother and sister. In 1967 the public schools there had yet to be integrated, even though it was more than 10 years after the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision. In this small West Virginian town, White schools were on the White side of town and Black schools were on the Black side. Despite our mixed-race background, my sister and I were enrolled in an all-White school. I felt immediate discomfort in this situation and responded with an act of defiance. I refused to participate and tuned out at school. I am not sure if the teacher thought I was stupid. My mother and father were alarmed by my poor showing in school and after six months they decided I should return to San Francisco.

I am not sure if what I experienced was racism or if it was just the culture shock of moving to a new place. Looking back on my six-year-old self it is hard to say if the alienation I felt was imposed externally or self-inflicted. I felt weird in that school, that is all I know. Would the experience have been different if I was not half Black? I will never know. On the West Coast, my elementary and junior high schools were in urban districts comprised primarily of Black, White, and Asian populations. In high school I would again return to an all-White school in Orange County, California, but this time I was better equipped to deal with it, largely because of my love of music.

In junior high school I started playing the saxophone. I was immediately, and I guess forever, drawn into the world of music. Music

offered me a world that was basically color-free. In high school and college, I was not viewed by students and teachers as White or Black; I was a saxophone player. I made many friendships, had many experiences, and discovered that music ran in my veins, well beyond the marching band, the parades, and the football stadiums.

This is not to say my adult life has not been touched by racism. Being a light skinned bi-racial person, the racism I have experienced is of a different sort. White people, some overtly racist and some who perhaps did not even realize their racist tendencies, would speak freely in my presence in offensive ways. These White people would say things to me or in front of me that they would never say to a more obviously Black man.

I have a B.S. in Business/Finance from the University of Southern California and later earned an M.S. in Secondary Education Social Studies from Hofstra University. Prior to becoming a teacher I worked in retail management as a district manager, responsible for the general operation of retail stores in the New York metropolitan area for a national chain. In this capacity, I learned I had a knack for communicating. Of all the hats I wore as a district manager for various companies, I found teaching junior employees to be the most enjoyable.

I have always been interested in history. My enjoyment in teaching at the workplace combined with my own quest for learning lead me to seriously consider becoming a public school teacher. My wife Raeanne made a similar second-career decision about a year before I did. She was so enthusiastic about becoming a teacher that it made me seriously consider the idea as well.

Between work in retail management and teaching, I was a bartender. Oddly enough, the lessons I learned as a bartender helped me prepare to be a teacher. Early in my bartending career, I discovered the importance of preparation. Being caught with not enough ice, or glassware, or fruit in the thick of a dinner rush is very unpleasant and leads to a strenuous and stressful evening, so I learned to prepare for what was coming. This skill set has been very helpful in my teaching career, as I know anything and everything can happen over the course of a school day, but if you have a well-thought-out lesson and your copies or other resources are lined up and ready to go, half the battle is won even when the unexpected occurs, which it almost always does.

I had a number of surprises when I began my high school teaching career in an inner-city school with an overwhelmingly Black and Latino student population. My commitment to advanced preparation was reinforced by students who taught me the value of structure. I find that students yearn for structure and want teachers to set limits within the classroom. They want a teacher who establishes and enforces rules, rituals, and routines. They want discipline that is balanced with humanity and warmth.

I was surprised to find that many of the inner-city students I work with have reading levels far below their grade levels and I had to adapt my teaching so that I was addressing their academic and social needs, not just the assigned curriculum. I was disappointed that a large percentage of my students have no chance of passing standardized exams and will not be able to graduate from high school because their reading comprehension is low. I was also disappointed that real lessons, real learning, and real connections are compromised as teachers are driven to push and drill students to prepare them for standardized tests.

Mostly, when I began teaching I was surprised at the political aspect of teaching that colors so much of what we do. I admit I was naive about this when I was studying to become a teacher. I just wanted to teach and thought it was a worthwhile, maybe even noble, endeavor. I had no idea I was going to become “Public Enemy #1” in the eyes of many people. The politics being played out in American society add stress and anxiety to teaching that is unnecessary and damaging to teachers, students, and communities.

At the high school where I teach social studies, I try to use a variety of teaching approaches including projects, skits, music, and debates that engage the interest of students. Usually I am free to try what I want and that is good. However, I am concerned because in the current culture of education, the measure of student and teacher performance increasingly boils down to the mandate that the kids must pass the test.

Lastly, I am disappointed in the lack of opportunity for students to discover in school what they are good at. To satisfy the demand for improved performance on standardized tests, urban schools have eliminated electives, vocational training, and many interesting courses that give students a “reason” to show up to school. It seems like our society has spent enormous amounts of money, time, and resources over the past several generations researching how to effectively educate kids, and then took the results and threw them out the window.

I believe an effective, but sometimes overlooked, teaching tool is the use of music in the classroom to teach about other subjects. There are two types of music that can enhance most social studies unit lesson plans; there is music from the various time periods of history and there is music written about an historical event or time period. For example, playing Mozart to a class brings to life the attitudes and emotions of the Enlightenment era. Likewise, Count Basie and Duke Ellington provide a soundtrack to the Harlem Renaissance. Students enjoy being introduced to “new sounds” from the past. Music from historical eras helps to enforce deeper levels of learning because it adds an emotional and sometimes physical connection to the lesson. It has been my experience that if you revisit a song toward the end of a school year, students will have better recall of the other content associated with the lesson.

The other type of music that I find effective in engaging students is music written about a specific event or time in history. When I first began teaching I would create a lesson plan on a topic, then I would look for a song about the event. Most of us can recall a song that stuck in our heads and almost everyone has learned some important content through the magic of a sticky tune. The perfect example of course is the Alphabet song set to an infectious piece by Amadeus Mozart. In my first years of teaching I hunted for music that delivered social studies content that could be utilized in the classroom. When I could not find it, I decided that I would write it myself. Partnering with my wife, Raeanne, we took on the U.S. history curriculum and left virtually no stone unturned. The finished product was HistoryTunes, and I am pleased that it has been in use in classrooms across the country since 2010. One of our efforts, *Robber Barons*, is at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9vOUhkmtSw>. *History for Music Lovers* (<http://www.youtube.com/user/historyteachers>) is also an excellent resource. In addition, music can serve as a motivator for students to write their own lyrics, songs, raps, or even create videos or slide shows to already existing songs using movie-maker programs, animator programs, or PowerPoint-type programs.

New teachers just starting out must be prepared to work hard. It helped me that I had been working for many years before deciding to become a teacher. All that free time you may think teachers have is really just enough time to learn your content area and to develop lesson plans.

From Lawyer to Teacher

by Jeffrey Cohn

Jeffrey Cohn is a social studies teacher at a suburban high school in New York State. His story, as told here, started out as a letter to me, so I have kept it in that format. Based on his own experience growing up and as a parent, Jeffrey has interesting views on the use of technology in the classroom and on the importance of racially integrating schools.—Alan Singer

Dear Alan,

I hope that you remember me. It was because of you that I got the opportunity at age 48 to change my career from lawyer to high school teacher. As a lawyer, I was often required to deal with people's miseries. After 25 years, I felt that I was suffocating. In addition, as a sole practitioner, I had to run the day-to-day business end of a law office. It was frustrating when bills had to be paid but little or no money had come in the previous week. I was unhappy but felt glued to a career from which there appeared to be no escape.

Incredibly, I just completed my eleventh year teaching. I only wish I made the decision to change careers earlier in my life. I love my job but at times I feel like the elder statesman in a department of 28 teachers, all of whom are at least 20 years younger than me. The good thing is that I keep up with these young people and provide a perspective of life experience that many of them do not have.

One morning 12 years ago I literally had an epiphany. I woke up and said to myself that I did not want to be a lawyer anymore. I felt my skill set and knowledge would be beneficial in a high school. Without telling my wife or family, and instead of going to the office, I drove to the local college where I earned my undergraduate degree and boldly informed an admission's official that I wanted to matriculate immediately as a student in the education program. Classes were scheduled to begin the next evening and the person I met with told me my request was impossible. Transcripts had to be obtained, my application had to be reviewed by a committee, and they did not know if there was room for me in the program. I became insistent, afraid that if I did not achieve my goal I would lose my nerve.

Finally they then sent me to your office where we spoke. I think you evaluated my sincerity and ability as we talked and decided I was a good candidate for the program. You warned me that some schools might not want to hire someone like me because of my age, but that others would value an individual with my life experience. I remember you made a phone call and I was in. Of course I had to go home and tell my family what I did. This did not go well at first and it took them a while to come around, but ultimately they supported my decision.

The earth, moon, and stars all seemed to come into alignment when I completed student teaching and entered the job market in 2000. There were numerous retirements that year and I had six interviews. I gradually became more adept at responding to questions and selling myself while not talking for too long a time, a common mistake of interviewees. I observed the body language of the people who were interviewing me and if I saw the slightest fidget I quickly concluded my answer.

At one high school, I was interviewed by a committee that included the chairperson. I was impressed by his warmth, sincerity, and love of the teaching profession and history. Even though the school was a bit of a hike from my house, I decided that if I was offered the position, I preferred working there. Several months went by without any word. Finally, the chairperson called me and said that my name had been sent to the superintendent, which in those days meant that you got the job. I was thrilled. Two other schools offered me positions, one minutes from my house, but I decided to go with my gut and stick with the school and department I liked best. I have never regretted my decision.

I definitely think my age and experience helped me land the job. I was not the typical 20-something who went from elementary to high school to college and then teacher certification. I had spent half of my life in the real world of work dealing with all types of people and handling all types of problems. In relationships with students I think my age has been a great benefit. At my age, 50 when I started and 62 now, the kids grant me a level of respect that promotes a classroom atmosphere that enhances learning. At the start of the year I always explain to students that I will give them the respect that they feel they deserve and I make a determined effort to do so. I truly believe they appreciate this and respond by granting me their respect.

The big catchphrase over the past couple of years has been TECHNOLOGY. Teachers are all supposed to incorporate technology into lessons. Many of my colleagues have *Smart Boards* in their rooms. The school did not give me one at the beginning even though I took the required preparatory course. Instead, I use a *Proxima* projector that connects to a computer. The *Proxima* is to a *Smart Board* what a VHS tape is to a Bluetooth DVD. Actually, I do not really mind having the older technology. I would rather organize lessons that engage students in discussions where I can bring out their analytical abilities and challenge them to disagree with what I may think on a particular topic than wiz them with the latest high-tech gizmo. They spend enough time staring at computer screens at home, much of which is a waste of time. I guess I am just old fashioned, my own children can attest to that.

I want to comment on your walking tour of Garden City with middle school students from Hempstead. I grew up in the village of

Hempstead, approximately two long blocks and one big world away from Garden City. During the 1960s, Garden City was a place the White kids in Hempstead sometimes went to with their parents to shop in some of the exclusive stores. We always marveled at the beautiful houses and we all knew that their school system was 100% White and virtually non-Jewish. Black kids would no sooner venture into Garden City than they would go headfirst off a cliff. Blacks were not welcome in that village. I remember one of my Black friends who actually did go into Garden City. He was stopped by the police and questioned as to why he was there and where he was going. I do not think that the place has changed much. I still ride through Hempstead and then through Garden City and I still marvel at the wild difference between the two communities. The only major difference has occurred in Hempstead, where most of the Whites have moved out and have been replaced by a sizable Hispanic population.

I went to Hempstead schools that were segregated in their own way. I lived in a White neighborhood so our local elementary school (K-8) was all White. Across town there were several elementary schools that only African American kids attended since their neighborhoods were predominantly Black. By ninth grade we all filtered into Hempstead High School, which in the mid-1960s was 65 percent Black and 35 percent White. Interestingly, we all got along. Parties and social events were mixed as were the classes, although tracking did result in some classes having a majority of one race over the other.

The high school where I now teach has approximately 1,500 students but only eight African American students this year. This demographic insulates White students from becoming acquainted with and understanding students from other backgrounds. When we talk about civil rights in a class of 30 White students, they are denied the perspective of students whose parents or grandparents might have been unable to vote or threatened with violence if they tried to. I inundate them with video clips showing the ordeal of the Little Rock Nine, but in insulated segregated all-White schools they cannot seem to grasp the horror of what those students endured when they tried to enter Central High School.

A major division between communities in the United States today is economic. Whites in communities such as Garden City have considerably more money than do the minority families that live in Hempstead and other Black and Latino towns, and they do not want to place this advantage at risk. I do not know what to do about this; the solution will not be easy.

First- and Third-Career Teacher

by Bobbie Robinson

Bobbie Robinson describes herself as a first- and third-career teacher. Her first career as a teacher was interrupted when she relocated across the country, got married and had children, and started a “middle” career working in a social service program. She did not return to the classroom for almost 30 years.—Alan Singer

My name is Georgiena Robinson, but I am known to friends and family as “Bobbie.” I started teaching when I was 47 year old and I have now been teaching for 10 years. My background is pretty much white-bread mainstream American. My ancestors are of Irish and English background with a teensy bit of Swiss. I grew up in northeastern Ohio between Akron and Kent. My family was comfortable and professional. My dad was a lawyer; my mom had been an English teacher, had seven children, and returned to teaching English to special education high school kids while I was in college.

I am the second oldest of seven kids, spaced tightly together. Just 11 years separate my older brother from the youngest one. We always knew that we were supposed to do well in school and go to college. My parents also made sure we learned how to swim, ski, and sail, along with the usual baseball, football, and basketball. The three girls were tomboys and played touch football with the neighborhood boys. Our house was the center of neighborhood sports and other activities. My older brother and I volunteered for the National Ski Patrol for the ski area near our home. In return for our 300–400 hours of work each winter, our whole family got to ski for free. We both loved that responsibility.

As a child I attended Roman Catholic schools from first grade on up, including grades 7–12 at an all-girls' school in Akron, Ohio, run by Dominican nuns. I received a challenging and terrific education there and loved the all-girls experience. It was liberating in many ways and tremendously confidence-building. I always loved school, and thrived there in every way. My classmates were from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, the daughters of doctors, lawyers, Akron's rubber companies' executives, and their factory workers as well. My dad did patent law for the tire companies; my best friend's dad worked on the assembly line, putting those patents to work. In our school, the differences didn't matter.

My family has known its share of tragedy. My closest sister, 18 months younger than I am, died suddenly in her sleep on her eighteenth birthday. We later learned that her heart had stopped as a result of a long struggle with anorexia and bulimia. When Denise died, the diseases were still almost completely unknown. My parents, after 28 years of marriage and many years of battling with each other, were divorced just after I was married. My father, successful as he was as a lawyer, was an alcoholic, and I watched it destroy much of his world and finally kill him. I think the hard experiences of my life help me understand some of the troubles my students go through. They have also taught me not to ignore warning signs and to reach out to a student I think may be in trouble.

As an undergraduate I majored at the University of Denver in History and Psychology with a minor in Secondary Education. I was just short of completing a Master's degree in psychology when my first of four children was born.

I married my husband when I was 23 and we are still married 35 years later. We raised four children together. All four were mostly good kids, involved in sports and tons of activities. They did well in school, and all went to and graduated from colleges that were far from home. Just like I did, they seemed to always know that doing well in school was just expected. We are fortunate that they knew how to “do” school, and enjoyed their years there. They have jobs they enjoy. I am proud that they are all readers, curious about and aware of what is going on in the world around them.

I actually made the decision to become a teacher twice, the first time in college and the second time when I was about 46. Let's talk about college first. I do not remember exactly why I decided to teach, and I did not decide until my junior year. While in high school, I had volunteered as a tutor for inner-city African American kids in Akron and I loved it. I had also taught skiing. Maybe with five younger siblings, I had always been teaching. I do remember that my father was very disturbed and disappointed when I told him I wanted to teach instead of going to law school. He told me that I was “wasting my brain!”

I student taught in a small alternative high school in Denver, and found a job at a Catholic girls' boarding school in the mountains of Canon City, Colorado. After a year there, I moved east to New York to get married. It was 1977 and there were no teaching jobs to be had in New York, mired as the city and region were in a fiscal crisis. For a year, I home-tutored kids who had been tossed out of school or were sick, and then began a series of other jobs, one of which turned into a 15-year YMCA career.

I began at the YMCA as a swimming teacher. After seven years in the pool, I moved into administration. My responsibilities included staff training and supervising both adults and teens. Eventually, I felt I was being pushed farther away from hands-on interactions with kids and teens and more into an office role. When I stopped to think about what really made me happy and looked back on the many

different jobs I had had, I saw that it was always the teaching part of those jobs that made me feel alive. Although I loved my YMCA job, I began to yearn to teach again. I walked away from the Y to go back to school to earn a Masters degree and teacher certification, not knowing exactly what would happen. It was a leap of faith.

Everything I had ever done prepared me for teaching. Parenting was excellent preparation, as were years of working with kids and teens at the YMCA. I had several sales jobs too, and once I began teaching, I realized I needed all those sales skills. Isn't teaching really a job of "selling" each day's information and class experience to the students as absolutely the most exciting and important thing they will learn and do that day? I think so! My jobs and my life taught me the importance of building rapport, a real key to successful teaching. When I look back at my first brief stint as a teacher, I do not give myself a very good grade. I needed all the life experiences to become mature enough, compassionate enough, wise enough, and patient enough to be a real teacher.

My students are always teaching me new ways to look at the world, a lesson, even a reading. They have taught me to laugh, and to not be afraid of loving them and showing it. They have taught me that I can never rest on my laurels, that I must always be trying harder to make my class a better experience for them. My many special education students have taught me perseverance and made me work to understand the ways their brains work. The kids have taught me to roll with the punches. I have learned that respect for them goes a long way, and that a classroom does not need a lot of rules if respect is really the norm.

I have learned that my room can be an oasis for them and for me, a little world without cursing, or put-downs, a world with civility and curiosity. I know now that no matter how bad the day can get with the adults in the building and the politics of teaching, I always feel better after class with my kids. They have taught me that every lesson is different, even if it is the same lesson five different periods a day, because of what they add to it.

I have learned that the kids want role models. They want to talk about values, what is right and what is wrong. They have taught me that they will work very hard and push themselves if they think something is worth learning and they believe that I really do care about them. I have learned from them to be honest, to praise them when they deserve it, and to be upset with them when they deserve that too.

I had left a workplace in which almost everything was done as part of a team. So I was surprised and terrified when I quickly realized that I was alone with 20 to 30 kids each period. That took some getting used to. Then, a few years later, I had to learn to share the room with my special-education collaborative teacher and a few student teachers as well. I had not realized how much of a control freak I am until I had to start letting go to both the kids and the other adults. I also had no idea how physically demanding the job of teacher is, as well as how emotionally exhausting it can be. It is an adrenaline roller coaster!

Before I returned to teaching, I blithely assumed that all or most kids were like my own and their friends—active, involved, and motivated students who liked going to school. When I began teaching high school, I quickly learned that many kids do not enjoy school at all, do not do well academically, are not connected through activities or sports, and are there only because they have to be. This was a surprise, but now these are the kids I work the hardest to convince and prove that coming to my class is a good experience.

There have been many more joys than disappointments over the last 10 years. It is still frustrating to admit that I cannot reach every single student and that I cannot help them all to make the changes they need to make in order to have some measure of success in school. I have to remember that they make choices and have the right to choose to fail. There have been times I want to just scoop a kid up and take him or her home after I have met his or her parent(s) and seen what the student has to deal with outside of school. It is hard not to be judgmental, but that does no one any good.

For many years, I have taught several sections of a course designed to help those kids deemed at risk coming out of middle school. We meet twice a day and the program helps most of the kids find a measure of success. I am disappointed that I could not turn it around for all of those students, but I also realize that for many of them, school has been difficult for many, many years. It is hard to change them and the school experience after many years of failure.

I want to pass along good advice colleagues gave to me when I returned to teaching. Remember that every day you get to start again. The kids probably do not remember a bad lesson or a bad day. They move on, so you should too, and just try again the next day. They also told me that once you get to Thanksgiving the year is almost over. How true that is. Each year, even the really hard ones, flies by.

Here is some of my own advice to new teachers, not presented in any particular order.

- Learn your students' names as quickly as you can. I put up huge sheets of paper with a seating chart for each class across the back of my room. I cheat and use that chart and make myself learn their names quickly. You can't have control of a class until you know their names.
- Do the homework, worksheets, assignments, everything else that you give your students yourself. That way you have credibility, and you understand what you are asking them to do.
- Put in whatever time you need to be really prepared for class, but do not expect that you can ever know everything you need to

know the first year. Be patient and let yourself add to your knowledge every year. Work hard; take no short cuts on preparation.

- Remember that the students did not ask to be in your class. You owe it to them to give it your best shot every day. If you are feeling tired or down some days—FAKE IT! Pretend you are raring to go and begin that class with energy; you'll be amazed by how much better you soon will feel.
- Teaching is a sales job, so just like in sales, remember to warm up your audience, build rapport, and then sell them on that day's information, insight, and importance.
- Teaching is also a cross between acting, following a script, and doing a stand-up, impromptu routine. Know what you want to accomplish each day, but be prepared for the different contributions of the audience—your students. Be prepared for the hecklers too, and do not let them get to you.
- Know the power of laughter. Laugh at yourself and with the kids, never at them. Learning goes better with positive emotion. You must set the tone of positivity in the classroom—that's your job.
- Create organization systems for yourself to save time and lessen anxiety. You will need systems for everything from distributing handouts, to collecting homework, to grading, to organizing lessons and units. This will probably take a lot of trial and error until you find what works for you. For example, Thursday nights I make up the homework sheet and plan for the next week putting together everything students will need. That way, I have a basic plan for the next week, and can scratch that off my "To Worry About List." Help students stay organized too. Remember that they have a lot going on in their lives and their brains.

I should warn you that after 10 years of teaching, I still never have enough time or enough sleep. I bring work home every evening. I spend at least one day most weekends doing school stuff. My lessons and units are never perfect—they always need tweaking. I have to remind myself to have what I call "Human Being Time," time doing things with family and friends that are not related to schoolwork. I confess, after 10 years I still need help finding the right balance.

An Officer and Then a Teacher

by Brian Joyce

Brian Joyce teaches at a school not far from the town where he grew up. According to Brian, he became a teacher because "In Iraq my platoon Sergeant (second in charge below me) and I would go outside of our perimeter and give candy and food to the kids. We saw death and destruction everyday, and we needed to feel human. We would put our guns on our backs and be armed with food, candy and soccer balls. We thought if we were going to die, we would die doing something good. Additionally we realized that the children of Iraq are the future of that country, and the only way to build a better Iraq is to connect with them. When I realized I was being medically discharged from the Army, I decided to become a teacher, because the children of the United States are no different then the children of Iraq. They are the future." His article grew out of an interview of Brian by Jaime Wood, a graduate student in the Hofstra University teacher education program.—Alan Singer

While in high school I decided to attend Virginia Tech, where I entered the Reserve Officer Training Corps. I was always interested in serving my country and thought ROTC would be fun and my brother was currently enrolled in the same program. He was two years ahead of me in college and loved it. I graduated from Virginia Tech in December 2001, three months after the 9/11 attacks, and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army. As a combat engineer, I was assigned to the 43rd Combat Engineer Company / 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) at Fort Carson, CO. I was deployed to Iraq from April 2003 to April 2004.

My combat engineering company consisted of approximately 250 soldiers. I had 35 soldiers, armored personnel carriers, and wheeled vehicles under my direct command. Our mission was to clear minefields, road obstacles, bunkers, and enemy defensive positions, as well as build temporary field bridges. In Iraq we also acted as a police force, local government, and providers of medical and social services. We patrolled the streets, searched cars for weapons, stopped people thought to be "bad," and conducted raids to capture "people of interest."

My platoon was tasked with conducting route clearance operations between the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah and back every morning between 5 and 7 am. The goal was to search for roadside bombs and sniff out ambushes so the road would be safe, so logistical convoys carrying fuel and food would not be attacked later in the day. Fallujah was important to the United States because it was the center of the Sunni Triangle. Originally we had no idea that it would be such a hard place to get under control. It soon became a hotbed for the insurgency and the most dangerous place to be an American soldier.

Most U.S. soldiers did not have a clear understanding of what was going on in Iraq. I found that the higher the education level of a soldier the better he or she could understand the situation. Many soldiers were clueless about the history of Iraq and the frictions between the different sects of Islam. As a soldier though, you do not think about why you are there or the politics behind it. You have a job to do, and the only thing that really matters is that you and your friends come home in one piece.

In August 2003, while conducting a route clearance between Ramada and Fallujah with a platoon of 3 armored vehicles and 15 men, we were ambushed by about 40 insurgents using rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons. One of the vehicles was hit with an armor-piercing RPG. The rocket entered the rear of the vehicle, taking off the legs of three soldiers before lodging itself in the vehicle's engine block.

After breaking contact with the enemy we eventually made it back to our base, where medical personnel were waiting. The youngest soldier in my platoon lost his leg on his twentieth birthday. I held his IV bag, trying to keep him awake between cries that he didn't want to die. Another man whose hip and leg was blown off turned purple because of loss of blood, but he survived. The third kept saying his missing foot was itchy. I felt personally responsible, being their platoon leader. I kept asking myself if I could have done anything differently. The hardest thing was the next day, going out and doing the same thing all over again, just like the day before.

In September 2003, my unit was moved to the Syrian border and I was assigned to oversee the Iraqi Passport Control, Immigration, and Customs Departments as well as train the Iraqi Border Patrol. I was 23 at the time, with no real training for this situation, in charge of 150 Iraqis who were extremely happy that the Americans were there. On my twenty-fourth birthday, I was meeting with the Head of Iraqi Immigration Police, drinking Iraqi tea, when an explosion blew in the windows. A 45-minute firefight ensued. The enemy was hidden all over the city, firing from all over the place. We spent the next three or four hours driving around hunting down the people who had been shooting at us. We had to sleep in our vehicles every night while mortars dropped around us.

In early April 2004, I boarded a plane for a 14- to 15-hour flight from Iraq to Colorado. I returned to the United States with both physical and mental scars. I was wounded in an ambush conducting a route clearance operation when my vehicle was struck by a rocketpropelled grenade, and I received shrapnel in my hands and forearms. Later I was involved in a vehicle accident in which the track snapped off the side of my vehicle while it was going about 40 mph. I was standing in the commander's hatch manning my weapon when this happened. The vehicle violently spun and rolled onto its side before hitting a pile of trash and flopping back on the ground. My upper body was outside the vehicle and my lower body was inside. My upper body "rag-dolled," flopping back and forth, herniating three disks

and pinching my sciatic nerve in my right leg. I lost feeling in my right leg for approximately eight months.

My friends and I started to drink heavily when we returned from Iraq. We would drink five to six nights a week from 4 pm to 2 am and get up at 5 am for physical training. We did this to cope with seeing death and destruction on a daily basis, killing people, being shot at, losing a year of our lives, and watching friends die. Eventually we realized we should not and could not be doing this to ourselves, and started to cut back. I was lucky to be living with guys who I fought with. We would get drunk and cry on each other's shoulders about what we had done, seen, and experienced. Eventually we learned to live with it.

After eight months stateside, my unit was redeployed to Iraq for another year. However, because of the injuries I received in combat, I remained behind assigned to Rear Detachment, where I helped arrange funerals and memorial ceremonies for soldiers killed in action, took care of family issues, and trained soldiers to replace the wounded.

When I found out that I was being medically discharged from the Army I knew I had to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. I knew I could not handle a desk job. I remembered how I felt about the children in Iraq and how we needed to connect with them since they are the future of that country. I thought how children in our country are not very different. If we want to ensure a prosperous future for this country, we need to connect with the children. Within a month of getting out of the Army I enrolled in a Masters program to become a teacher.

As a soldier you understand that commitment and dedication to the mission and to your fellow soldiers is paramount. That translates well into the classroom. Having led soldiers in the toughest of situations, you learn what makes them tick, as well as when their minds are distracted. As a teacher it is extremely important to know what motivates your students and to be able to harness that, as well as know when something is just not right. Additionally, after experiencing what I have been through, the "stress" of teaching is almost nonexistent.

I often discuss my experiences in Iraq and the military with my students. I developed a School and Community Leadership class where the curriculum is based on my experiences as an Army officer. The class covers the basics of leadership, motivation, and human relations. Personal stories of success and failure from my own leadership experience seem to be very useful for generating student interest and thoughtful reflection on their own ideas. I also discuss my experiences, but to a lesser extent, in my other classes. The students are extremely receptive and captivated by the stories. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are unique in the fact that less than 1% of the population of this country is affected by them. Hearing first-hand accounts of the war is an eye opening experience for them.

The most rewarding thing about teaching is when students thank you for all you have taught them, not only about the subject matter but also about life in general. I recently had a graduating senior tell me that I have been his role model for the last four years, and that I have inspired him to be the best person he can be. As a teacher, you can truly make a difference in the lives of your students. Most the time you do not even realize the extent of the impact.

The biggest surprise for me as a teacher was how the students did not automatically respect me and listen to me. As an Army officer you are shown respect for who you are and the position you hold. When you say something everyone listens, and if they do not, there are sergeants to make them listen. As a first-year teacher I taught seniors, and until I established a rapport with them they tried to test me in every possible way. I was not accustomed to being challenged, especially by teenagers. It was difficult at first, but after the first week I was able to figure out how to manage the classroom and develop a positive classroom atmosphere. One student who was relentless in trying to do things her way and never back down from an argument or follow a rule told me when she came back to visit several years after graduating that I changed her life and opened her eyes to the world around her. We keep in touch to this day.

Balancing Career and Family

by Krishma Arora

Krishma Arora has two young children ages six and four and is struggling trying to balance family and career. Her husband is an entrepreneur trying to expand their family-owned business. After college, Krishma planned to enter the business world as well and she earned a Masters degree in Marketing. However she later switched to teaching, which she always considered her first love. Krishma discusses how difficult she found the transition to teaching.—Alan Singer

I was born in Chandigarh, part of the Punjab, a state in the northeastern region of India. When I was four years old, I immigrated to the United States with my parents, brother, and sister. My family is Sikh, the fifth largest religion in the world, but a religion that is little known in the United States. Sikhs believe in one universal God who teaches us to celebrate the unity in all our diversity. For religious reasons, Sikh men have a distinctive appearance. They do not cut their hair and they wear turbans and beards. Unfortunately, in the decade since the attacks on September 11, 2001, Sikhs in the United States have been subject to misunderstanding and intolerance, including a 2012 attack on a Sikh temple in Wisconsin.

When my family arrived in the United States I spoke fluent Hindi and Punjabi, but because I was so young, I had no prior education in the English language. At first we lived in an immigrant community in a large urban area, where I blended in easily and felt accepted by my peers, who spoke various languages and like myself were learning English. However, my older brother was often beaten up after school by kids because he wore a turban. Somehow, despite the diverse cultures in our neighborhood, it was not a tolerant place and daily life for my brother and parents became difficult.

My parents took the advice of family and friends and moved to a very uniform overwhelmingly suburban community. Ironically, the predominantly White school and neighborhood was more tolerant of my family's religious differences. My brother felt safe and more accepted in his new school, where he was the first and only turbaned Sikh. I was, however, immediately placed in an ESL (English as a Second Language) class. I also felt awkwardly out of place because of my darker skin color, my clothing, and my lack of understanding of the social environment. Fortunately, after a few weeks the ESL teacher reported that I did not need her services and should be assigned to regular classes. From then on my priority became fitting into the culture of the suburban community and my new home in the United States. I also became an excellent student, earning a scholarship to New York University, where I majored in philosophy with a minor in sociology. My dream was to eventually earn a PHD and become a University professor.

I always wanted to teach because I loved being in school and loved all my teachers when I was growing up. However, after I graduated from NYU I got married and moved to England with my husband. While there I worked with McGraw-Hill Publishing Company. I became interested in marketing and when we returned to the United States, I earned a Masters degree in that field. Over the next few years we moved back and forth between countries, I worked in medical research and real estate, taught at a Sikh cultural and religious school, and started having a family. After about 10 years I decided to visit my old high school teachers and asked them for advice on beginning a teaching career.

My decision to become a teacher was driven by my desire to work with young people, to positively influence and guide their lives the way my teachers had done when I was a student, and to help Americans better understand the Sikh people, religion, and culture. My best teachers were excellent role models. They worked hard to help us see things outside of the box. They taught us to think critically and creatively and to aspire to make the best of our abilities. They had the highest expectations for their students academically and morally. They never judged or discouraged students and as a result I always respected and admired them. Like them, I strive to respect my students and be a model for them to learn from. From these teachers I learned that to earn respect, I have to first give respect.

As a high school student and as a student teacher I was in relatively affluent suburban communities with warm, caring atmospheres. My first teaching position was in a very different and difficult urban high school slated to be closed because of poor student performance. This very large school housed thousands of students split into smaller learning academies. I was hired as a leave replacement for classes that had been passed to different substitutes on a daily basis for almost two months. The entire environment of the school, with metal detectors in the entrance, metal barred windows, and security officers patrolling the building, made me feel more like a guard than a teacher, and I think it made many of the young people attending the school feel more like prisoners than students. My life was made even more difficult by a two-hour rush hour commute to work every day.

I cannot claim that my view of these kids was without prejudice. Nonetheless, I was determined that I would not let my preconceptions and stories I heard from other teachers intimidate me or turn me into the kind of teacher I did not want to be. I was determined to give these kids the benefit of the doubt; I was going to give them the respect they deserved even if they did not immediately respect me in return. I decided not to make them follow instructions through force and threat, but by extreme patience and kindness. I had five classes to

teach and the “preps” to work on from scratch with a rather vague curriculum. I had 30 students in each class, and from day one I knew that I had taken upon myself one of the biggest challenges of my life.

The students tested me time after time, waiting for me to punish and threaten them, but I would not do it. I would ask them politely to sit down, to quiet down, to listen, and to work. Perhaps, in hindsight I could have been stricter from day one and loosened up as I went along and this would have saved me from my eventual nervous breakdown and loss of voice, but I wanted to know and test something bigger than just my one experience here. I wanted to know for myself whether good teachers are the ones who are strict and have classroom management down to perfection, or the ones who build a rapport with their students. Balancing these qualities was my toughest challenge, a challenge I had not anticipated based on my previously limited experience. I also believed that teaching students to respect themselves, their peers, their teachers, and learning was more important to their lives than the content of the correction.

Part of my problem was the disorganization of the school. I was assigned a room in a trailer outside the main building and the first week I had to scramble to get a projector, a laptop, and other equipment for my classroom. I challenged administrators who told me that since the students did not do homework they did not need textbooks and was eventually able to send home a textbook with each student.

I quickly learned a number of important lessons.

- Little was expected of these students and that was the big reason why little was achieved.
- Teacher threats and phone calls home, which were standard protocol in this school, only left students hating school and even less motivated to succeed.
- My first inclination was to blame the teachers, who always seemed frustrated with the students and angry, from what I was witnessing. However, I came to realize that the problems we were facing go far beyond individual classrooms.
- As I grew frustrated I started blaming students for their behavior and for what seemed to be continuous fighting, but I also knew that they were the real victims of a school system and society that condemned them to failure.
- I also realized I could not blame myself for my inadequacies because no one could be superman or superwoman.
- The hardest thing I had to learn was that I could not physically do it all or “save” every kid and I had to stop beating up on myself for my failings.

I almost quit after two weeks because the mental stress of the classroom environment and the physical strain of the commute and job were more than I could bear in addition to my family responsibilities. Juggling family and work was much harder than I imagined. Often I was too tired or unavailable for my sons. The boys wanted mommy to play with them, but mommy always had too much work to do. The household needed looking after, but I was too tired. My advice to teachers with families is to accept that you will not be able to do everything perfectly, and to arrange childcare or help with other family responsibilities before you begin working. Being better prepared in advance would have helped me a lot at home and at work.

Despite all of these difficulties I did not quit and I am glad I made that decision. I could not be a quitter; too many students needed me and I realized that I could not give up on them or on myself. Gradually I became better organized and they had a clearer sense of my expectations. I graded both class work and homework on a daily basis (more work for me though), and convinced them that these were easy ways to improve their grades. My students liked this approach because tests made them nervous and it was easier to do well if they did the work. I stressed to them the importance of quality rather than quantity. I also did a lot of writing assignments in class to develop their grammar, sentence structures, and vocabulary. I found that they worked better in pairs than in large groups. They also did not like station activities that required them to move around the room, an activity that had worked so well in the suburbs where I student taught. I learned along the way that every student and student body is unique with their own set of strengths, weaknesses, positives, and negatives.

One size does not fit all. If you want to be a great teacher you have to adapt to your students and their needs, rather than trying to make them adjust to your style. Being a good teacher means being able to make changes, to run with what's new or captures student interest, and to use student feedback to guide your teaching. I began to think in terms of how student work reflected my ability to teach them, rather than their ability to learn. I changed the format of my tests and quizzes so they would succeed rather than fail. I used instructions to get them involved rather than just listening. I realized that the guide to being an effective teacher was not listed in some theoretical book, but lay with my students. I may have been teaching them, but I was also learning a great deal about being a teacher from them. I also found it useful to write self-reflections every day to record my experiences.

On the last day of the school year, I asked students to write on an index card their names and one thing unrelated to the subject that they learned from me by just being in my class. Their responses were tremendous and left me very emotional. Many students had seen me as a mother figure, someone who cared for them, who they admired. They wrote that they learned patience and about the importance of working hard and going to college. They helped me realize that the little things I would say and do made a very big impact on them.

Teaching has made me grow as a person, and I cannot imagine ever giving it up in the future. The joy and challenges of being in the

classroom have become a part of a natural landscape. Those who have come to teaching from another career like myself know how much more commitment, effort, and bits of one's soul are required in this job as compared to other careers. Teach only if you love it. Teach if you honestly will give your all to the kids. Otherwise we do the students and society a great injustice.

Section E: Introduction to Online Stories by Veteran Teachers

Teaching Stories (1997) is the title of a book by a San Francisco, California, middle school teacher named Judy Logan. It is one of my favorite books about teaching, and I highly recommend it. Judy is committed to a student-centered project-based approach to teaching social studies and literature, and she is not afraid to develop personal relationships with her students or to “rock the boat.” Her students create history quilts and write poetry to celebrate the past, to draw connections between historical events and the experience of their own families, and to demonstrate their understanding of content material. They create class rituals that define membership in their tribe. They go on camping trips to build their sense of community.

Judy tries to maximize student participation in governing the classroom and the projects. She writes, “If I control the content, I try to let them control the form. If I control the form, I try to let students control the content” of projects (p. 17). She wants all of her students to be able to see themselves “mirrored in the content of the curriculum” (p. 18).

Some of my teacher education students have found her more unorthodox projects a little unnerving. Judy developed an activity she calls “Stealing Stories” where her students read and discuss stories about taking something that does not belong to you. Judy believes that sharing these and their own stories gives students a chance to “cultivate wisdom” about themselves and others and is far more effective for developing values than humiliating or punishing them for breaking rules.

My favorite story from her book is about a rite of passage project Judy calls “Angela's Ritual.” A seventh-grade girl named Angela asked Judy to organize a menstruation ceremony to commemorate her first period. The ritual was held at Angela's home and included her parents, friends, and teachers. When we discuss this story, most of the students in my pre-service class shout “Never!” They will never do anything like this; it is too risky; it is not “school-related,” and it would jeopardize their careers.

I try to focus class discussion on the significance of the project rather than the professional risk. I usually ask the women in the class if they would be willing to share with the group either their own experiences as they entered puberty or the experience of a close female friend or relative. Once we start going around the room, the stories become more and more painful as the women report on their own ignorance and fear as their bodies began to change and the humiliations they suffered at the hands of the boys in their classes. Sometimes the atmosphere in class becomes so intense that the men begin to spontaneously apologize declaring, “We didn't know. We didn't understand.” The point, however, is that there was no way they could know because the subject of sexual maturation was taboo in their classes. By taking menstruation out of the closet and making it a subject for discussion and celebration, Judy Logan made it possible for the young women and men in her classes to reconsider their behavior and build a classroom based on respect and gender equity.

I confess that I was rarely as brave as Judy Logan; yet I still consider some of my personal teaching stories as moments of triumph. Others, however, are so embarrassing I never discuss them. But they have all shaped me as a teacher and an individual. As you begin to teach, you will assemble your own collection of teaching stories. In the meantime, some veteran teachers have agreed to share theirs with you (C2c). As you read Maureen Murphy's story online about how her childhood experiences and religious beliefs led her to become an English teacher and Rhonda Eisenberg's discussion online of being a mathematics teacher and department

chair in an inner-city high school, ask yourselves, “What is a teacher?”

Maureen Murphy assisted me in developing this book and is a good friend. She is the English Education Coordinator in the Hofstra University School of Education. Maureen taught secondary school briefly as a young woman before going to graduate school and becoming a University professor. Her area of expertise is Irish literature and history and she edited a 1,000-page interdisciplinary curriculum guide on the Great Irish Famine for the New York State Department of Education. When she read Maureen's story about being from a “family of teachers,” Robin Edwards, a New York City high school teacher, felt that it resonated with her own story in a number of ways. Robin's father was a social studies teacher and school administrator and her mother teaches mathematics. At first they discouraged her from becoming a teacher, but when they realized that it was her great love, they gave their full support. Of course they kept on fighting over which subject area she should concentrate on.

Rhonda Eisenberg, a former high school math department chairperson, is one of my oldest friends. We student taught at the same time while students at the City College of New York and used to meet once a week as an informal support team. Later we worked together as camp counselors and community organizers. As beginning teachers, we continued to meet regularly as we tried to figure out how to be teachers. When she wrote about her teaching experiences, Rhonda was math chair at an inner-city high school. She later became the chair in a relatively affluent community. In both cases her advice to teachers was to be well grounded in the math themselves, have a clear sense of where they want to take their students, and to always start from where their students are.

David Morris is one of the teachers I wrote about in the “My Best Teachers” section in [Chapter 3](#). I cannot overemphasize the importance of colleagues who share your goals and approaches to education. They are partners in transforming the lives of students and schools. Since I left Edward R. Murrow High School, David and I have continued to work together. He has been a cooperating teacher for observers and student teachers, a high school assistant principal and principal, as well as an adjunct assistant professor at Hofstra University. Charles Cronin was a pre-service teacher who helped to review the first edition of this book. Following discussion of David Morris' “Teaching Story” in class, Charles sent the following email message: “Dr. Morris is saying that we have to try and find things that we have in common with our students. These connections can help to establish a trusting relationship. He uses his experience as an immigrant from Barbados to establish connections with the high school students he teaches. I have taken his methods class and he also used incidents from his daily life to make similar connections with us. I am looking forward to student teaching in the spring. It is my belief that if I can hold on long enough, that I will be able to build the bonds of trust and experience needed to make me a successful teacher.”

S. Maxwell Hines or “Max” assisted in editing the first edition of this book and is another good friend. She was the Science Education Coordinator in the Hofstra University School of Education before relocating to Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina. As a young African American girl, Max was one of those students who was alternately ignored by some teachers and promoted by others as a model Black student. In graduate school, she stopped using her first name because she felt her work as a scientist was devalued because she was a woman. An important question to consider as you read her story is whether her experience should be considered an exception or as a suggestion of possibility.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—TEACHING STORIES BY VETERAN TEACHERS

Questions to Consider about Judy Logan:

1. What do you think of Judy Logan's approach to teaching? Why?
2. Do you have any teaching stories of your own yet? If yes, why are they important to you?

Questions to Consider about Maureen Murphy:

1. What is your family's attitude about teachers and teaching? How has this shaped your own views?
2. In her classes for teachers, Maureen argues that literary content is as important as the reading and writing process. She believes that reading quality literature helps secondary students learn to express complex ideas clearly and stimulates them to ponder serious philosophical questions. Do you agree? Explain your views.
3. Maureen believes that teachers must value student experiences and connect with their lives. Do you share her belief that this is part of the job of the teacher? Explain.

Questions to Consider about Rhonda Eisenberg:

1. Rhonda writes that “a major aspect of what I am as a teacher are my beliefs. I am convinced that as human beings we all have the same ‘brain,’ so we all can learn. I also really feel that people have a responsibility towards each other and that the more our society educates teenagers, the better their lives will be, and the better the world will be.” Do you agree with these underlying beliefs? Explain your views.
2. The way Rhonda felt about school as a student was very much a reflection of how she was treated by her teachers and their expectations. Were your experiences similar to hers? Explain.
3. Rhonda relates some of the experiences that shaped her development as a teacher. Which do you consider most crucial? Why?

Questions to Consider about David Morris:

1. David Morris writes that he considers himself a teacher, rather than an historian or a history teacher. “For me, teaching is teaching. Give me a package to present and I will find a way to teach it. I taught math, English, and science in evening high school equivalency programs. I know many educators argue that content knowledge is fundamental to effective teaching. But I consider it more important to focus on the process of learning.” Do you agree or disagree with his position? Explain your views.
2. Do you believe it is possible to develop “bonds of trust” with students from backgrounds different from your own? Explain.

Questions to Consider about S. Maxwell Hines:

1. S. Maxwell Hines attributes many of the problems she faced in school to attitudes about race in the United States. She describes being stereotyped as a woman and as an African American and pushed to go in a direction she did not want to take. Have you, or someone you know, had a similar experience? Describe the experience and explain how the person responded.
2. As a young teacher, S. Maxwell Hines came to believe that if she “figured out what made my students ‘tick,’ something would get through to them.” Do believe this is the obligation of a teacher? Explain.

In an online essay geared to this chapter I discuss Jonathan Levin (E3), a high school English teacher whose murder in 1997 led many to reconsider their reason for teaching, and my views on Teach for America (E4).

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BOOK II

PRO/CLASS Practices—Planning, Relationships, Organization, Community

An Introduction to PRO/CLASS Practices

On my first day as a high school teacher, a week into the school year, an older adult whom I did not recognize (he probably was not that old, but I was only 28) came into my classroom and yelled, “Why are students out of their seats?” He was referring to three students who were walking toward my desk to hand in assignments they had just completed. As quickly as he had entered, he left the room. The unexpected visitor turned out to be the school's principal.

Later, when I learned who he was, my stomach started to knot. I had waited a long time for this opportunity and now I was worried that I would be fired on my first day. It turned out that my transgression of school rules (students were not permitted out of their seats during instruction) was not considered that serious, largely because students were frequently out of their seats and often out of the rooms. The principal, who was in the middle of responding to an emergency in the building at the time he passed by my room, did not refer to the incident when we were formally introduced. Although I remained unnerved, my job was safe.

Miranda Bellamy, a former student who became a teacher after a career in the military, learned a similar lesson in her first days as a teacher in North Carolina. Miranda took over classes that had already had two teachers who left, and the students were accustomed to not paying attention and not doing work. Miranda, stressed and afraid she would be fired, emailed me for advice just before the Christmas break and I suggested three things.

1. Just hold out until the holiday. When you come back the students will be more responsive because they will believe you are really their teacher and not a temporary substitute.
2. When the students return to school it will be a new year. Establish new class rules and procedures and assign new seats. This will help confirm it is your classroom and you are the teacher.
3. Don't quit on them or yourself.

Miranda felt a little better, especially after she also learned from another teacher that the school administration was rooting for her to succeed. They understood these were hard-to-reach students and that following two teachers who had quit made it an especially difficult situation. Miranda and I have kept in touch and not only did the situation improve, but she actually began to enjoy teaching and experiencing success along with her students.

Student teachers and beginning teachers are often obsessed with the problem of classroom control. They feel they are being judged, not only by the way students perform, but also by the way they behave. Many fear they are one casual observation or parental complaint away from unemployment.

In most cases the fear is unreasonable. I tell student teachers in our program, “If we did not think you could student teach, we would not have let you.” Similarly, if school administrators do not think a “beginner” has the ability to become a good teacher, they do not hire him or her. Most reasonable people do not expect anyone to be an expert on their first day. If they wanted an expert, they would have hired someone with experience.

Philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote, “To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.” Deon Mitchell and

Michael Pezone, whom you met earlier in this book, developed their own ways of overcoming fear and preparing for difficult situations. Deon turns to prayer, whereas Michael is a Zen aficionado. Some of his favorite Zen stories are included in [Chapter 10](#).

Part of the problem with the fear of failure is that it pushes beginning teachers into self-defeating classroom practices. They frequently end up with scripted, impossibly complex lesson plans that translate into long, boring, teacher-centered lessons. Classrooms and learning become painful for students and they rebel. Teachers respond by cracking down, and the cycle of boredom, resistance, and punishment escalates. As a beginning teacher, you find yourself becoming the kind of teacher you hated. But it does not have to happen this way! Teaching and learning can be fun and exciting. You can become the teacher you want to be. It takes time and hard work, but you can do it.

In [Book II](#), we examine ways that teachers can design lessons, develop personal connections with students, and build classroom communities. I call this approach to teaching PRO/CLASS Practices. We will not be learning foolproof formulas. They do not exist. Instead, we will look at principles of teaching and ideas about teenagers that my colleagues and I think make sense. But you need to reinterpret and refine them as you develop your own approach to teaching. As I think you have learned from the stories told by teachers in [Book I](#), there is not just one right way.

Before we go on, I have to make a confession. People always wonder how you end up with a nice acronym like PRO/CLASS Practices—Planning, Relationships, Organization, Community, Literacy, Assessment, Support, and Struggle. I confess that I cheated. I made a list of key terms and moved them around until they spelled something I thought was memorable. I really did start with “P” for Planning, “R” for Relationships, “O” for Organization, and “C” for Community, just not in that order. At any rate, these four topics will be examined in [Book II](#), [chapters 3, 4, 5](#), and [6](#). As you examine the list and the explanations that follow, consider which you would give priority to in your teaching and prepare to explain why.

- **Planning:** Lessons that relate to student interests, involve students in activities, and are appropriate to their academic performance level are more likely to hold student attention and involve students in learning. They may even be fun. For this edition I have added an extended discussion of the new national Common Core Standards.
- **Relationships:** Students who feel that their teacher cares about them as human beings, and is willing to respond to their needs and concerns, will be more willing to cooperate, even if they do not understand or agree with instructions. When a teacher helps one student out, or just gives a student who is having difficulty a break, somehow all the other students quickly know.
- **Organization:** As a teacher, you can structure lessons and set up a classroom to minimize conflicts and encourage student participation (e.g., use assignments to settle the class and establish a context for the lesson; shift desks for group, individual, or full class activities; limit bathroom visits so that students can be engaged by class work; involve students in developing reasonable classroom procedures).
- **Community:** As students develop a sense of relationship with each other and the teacher, an interest in the topics being explored, and confidence that they will not be put down, and as they are convinced that their ideas will be heard, they develop a commitment to the success of the class. Individuals

become classroom leaders committed to the class as a democratic community of learners and draw their classmates into the community. As a group, they want to learn and they take responsibility for what goes on in their class.

- **Literacy:** Preparing students for full participation in a democratic society means empowering them through the enhancement of critical literacies. Please note literacies is plural. Students need to learn how to learn; find and evaluate information available in different formats; think systematically; support arguments with evidence; present ideas clearly, both orally and in writing; and evaluate their own work and the work of others. For this edition, there is a fuller discussion of the importance of technological literacy for both students and teachers.
- **Assessment:** Nobody makes good choices all the time. The key to growth as a teacher is to think about what you are doing and make the best choices you can. Think of your classroom problems as learning experiences rather than as personal failures. Reflect on your goals and how you can achieve them with this particular group of students. Think of student examinations as tests of what you have taught. It is never too late to change what you are doing. While you spent all night (or all weekend) worrying about a particular incident and its impact on the class, the students probably haven't thought about it since they left the room. Try to relax a little bit. For this edition, I have added discussion of new assessments that are being introduced for both student teachers and teachers.
- **Support:** Everybody has “bad hair days.” Instead of dumping on students, give them a little space. Treat them the way you would want to be treated if you had just had a fight with your mother, were overtired, or were just plain grumpy. Instead of backing a student into a corner and provoking an explosion, try a dramatic shrug and taking it up later after everyone has calmed down. When a troublesome student or class responds positively, make a big deal of it. Show them that you care.
- **Struggle:** There is no magic wand. Change never happens instantaneously. Why should adolescents behave any differently from other people? Being an effective teacher means engaging in a long-term struggle to convince students that your goals for the class make sense and are worth examining.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—PRO/CLASS PRACTICES

Question to Consider:

1. Which of these PRO/CLASS practices would you give priority to in your teaching? Why?

Suggestions for Further Reading

Other teachers and books on teaching emphasize similar ideas. These are books that have helped me to think about my work as a teacher, and I recommend them highly.

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3

PLANNING: HOW DO YOU PLAN A LESSON?

In the movie musical *The Sound of Music* (1965), Maria, the Singing Nun, recommends that we start to learn at the very beginning—when you read you begin with A, B, C and when you sing you begin with do, ray, me. We will begin learning about lesson planning from the very beginning as well, by discussing goals, teaching strategies, and finally, lesson formats.

Section A: What Are Your Goals?

William Shakespeare wrote a play called *Much Ado About Nothing*. I think much of the debate over education in the United States today would more appropriately be titled, “Much Ado About the Wrong Things.” For example, everybody (politicians, parents, and teachers) is worried about higher standards, the development of what has come to be called the “common core” curriculum, and the assessment of student learning. It seems like every educational organization has its own published list of what children should know and every political unit (city, county, or state) has its own standardized tests that students are expected to pass. But there is very little public discussion of exactly what we mean by standards. Most experienced teachers I know respond to the call for higher standards or the integration of skills-based activities in content area subjects by saying, “This is the same thing we always do.”

I think the general public finds the call for higher standards confusing because the term means different things in different contexts. In track and field, the standard is the record performance that other athletes try to surpass. In baseball, it is the Yankees with a century of accomplishment. In basketball and tennis it is often identified with one player, Kobe Bryant or Roger Federer (or maybe Rafael Nadal). But everybody cannot be like Kobe, Roger, or the Yankees, and that is the problem with using the top performer as a measure or standard.

In education, standards can best be described as goals—the things we hope all students will achieve, the things we plan for them to achieve. Achieving standards is not a competition. In theory, in a well-run classroom with effective teaching strategies, every student should be able to obtain the goals. There does not have to be a “Race to the Top,” as the Obama Administration advocated.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers. By December 2011, they had been adopted by 45 of the 50 states in the United States plus the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. If you examine the Common Core State Standards, you can see why I describe them as goals. First, they tend to be very broad with little specificity. According to the general standards, students should be able to “demonstrate independence,” have “strong content knowledge,” “respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline,” “comprehend as well as critique,” “value evidence,” “use technology and digital media strategically and capably,” and “come to understand other perspectives and cultures.” Second, they focus almost entirely on reading, writing, and math skills, either acquired in English and math classes, or in the other classes where students are supposed to be learning other subjects. For English Language Arts, as well as in social studies/history, science, and technical subjects, secondary school students are expected to be able to “Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text; determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas; and analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text” (<http://www.corestandards.org>).

But the standards do not prescribe a specific calendar of lessons, instructional strategies, or transitional learning outcomes. These are left to the professional discretion of teachers who, individually, and in

conjunction with their subject area colleagues, must figure out the best ways for their students to acquire and develop these skills over the course of a year. As long as students perform satisfactorily on assessments, teachers are generally allowed wide latitude in determining what and how they will teach. Because of the intimate relationship between standards and assessments, we will return to this topic in greater detail in the chapter on assessing student learning.

Most of my experience in secondary schools was as a social studies teacher, but I have also taught reading, English, general science, shop, and business math, and I believe the principles for successful planning are similar. In my social studies methods classes, I recommend that teachers plan units, or packages of 10 to 12 lessons at a time, and that they start by “brainstorming” a list of both long-term (unit) and lesson-specific goals. I find it useful to think in terms of four distinct types of goals—concepts, content, academic skills, and social skills.

- Concepts are broad, overarching terms or principles that are continually reexamined throughout a curriculum, such as democracy in social studies, character development in English, standard temperature and pressure in chemistry, or congruence in geometry. They also include main ideas and understandings that are specific to a unit or an individual lesson, for example, causal relationships in history or science, recognition of particular character traits in literature, or a rule for conjugating verbs in a foreign language class.
- Content refers to the factual information about a topic that will be considered during the unit or lesson, for example, the result of a chemical reaction, the procedure for solving an equation, the way a poet describes a person, or a sequence of events from the past.
- Academic skills include activities such as thinking critically, writing expressively, speaking clearly, and gathering and organizing information presented in different formats.
- Social skills involve learning to work effectively in a group, to take responsibility for individual work, to coach a fellow student, or to provide leadership on a class project.

Advanced planning is not unique to teaching. Anyone who has worked in the business world, played an organized team sport, competed in chess or poker, or has been in the military knows the importance of having a strategy to achieve success. A lesson plan is our strategy to achieve our goals.

Most new teachers and many experienced teachers start their planning from a textbook, following its organization of the subject and emphasizing its concept, main idea, content, and skill choices. Starting from the textbook is helpful when teachers do not feel comfortable with their own knowledge of the subject or the scope of the curriculum. It can also make it easier for students to follow the sequence of lessons. But there are potential problems with this approach. Students become overwhelmed by facts, main ideas are lost in a swirl of details, lessons are dry, and students grow bored. In addition, when teachers are dependent on packaged textbook-based units, they sacrifice much of their own creative energy. They become part of an information conveyor belt, instead of being active learners themselves.

It is often very difficult to decide in advance how much planning is enough. Certainly, unit and lesson planning is more an art than a science, and decisions become easier as a teacher gains experience. As you plan, it is useful to ask yourself some questions.

- Does this unit build on previous work and understanding?
- Does this unit lay the basis for future explorations?
- Does study of the content also enhance student mastery of essential skills?
- Do I understand the period, the broader issues, or the topic? Will students understand them based on these lessons?
- Is there sufficient material for students to analyze in class? Do the lessons include enough active things for students to do?
- Does the unit cover the same scope and/or information as the textbook assignments?
- How closely do I want them to parallel each other?
- Are my lesson designs varied and interesting?

If planning seems daunting, remember that there is no reason that supervisors, experienced teachers, and beginners should not work together to develop a curriculum. Lesson and unit planning does not have to be a private, individual experience or a competitive sport. When teachers work together, old-timers benefit from new insights and perspectives, and rookies do not have to discover every document for themselves and reinvent every teaching strategy. At a minimum, new teachers should not be afraid to borrow. That is why they invented the copying machine.

Table 3.1 Organizing a Unit

	Topic	Goals	Concepts	Main Ideas	Content	Skills	Materials	Design
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
Unit Assessment:								

Framework for Unit Plan Design

Topic: What will be taught on this day

Goals: Where lesson fits into broader strategies for achieving common core standards, for example, to promote literacy or critical thinking

Concepts: Broad categories of fundamental ideas, for example, democracy, sequence, communicative principle, causality

Main Ideas: Specific ideas, relationships, or formulas examined in this lesson.

Content: Specific information examined in this lesson

Academic and Social Skills: Subject-related skills developed in this lesson, for example, problem-solving

and social skills, e.g. cooperative learning, that will be emphasized

Materials: Technology, activity sheets, and so on

Design: Full class or group, demonstration or discussion, and so on

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—ADVANCED PLANNING

Questions to Consider:

1. Describe a nonteaching activity in which you have learned to plan in advance.
2. What are the crucial aspects you focused on in your advanced planning for this activity?

Section B: Turning Common Core on Its Head

The new national Common Core Standards are supposed to improve, if not revolutionize, education in the United States. According to its website (<http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards>), “[t]he Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort ... developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce.” The standards are supposedly “informed by the highest, most effective models from states across the country and countries around the world, and provide teachers and parents with a common understanding of what students are expected to learn.” The belief is that “[c]onsistent standards will provide appropriate benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live” in the United States.

Proponents of Common Core claim that the standards will allow states to create curriculum and teachers to align instruction with the expectations for students of college and work. These include promoting higher-order skills as well as content acquisition. Lauren Davis, senior editor of Eye on Education, is one of the big advocates for the Common Core Standards. Eye on Education is distributing a pamphlet offering staff development workshops and keynote speeches promoting “5 Things Every Teacher Should be Doing to Meet the Common Core State Standards.” For Davis and her associates, “The Common Core State Standards highlight five shifts that should be happening in every classroom.” They want teachers to lead “high-level, text-based discussions”; “focus on process, not just content”; “create assignments for real audiences and with real purpose”; “teach argument, not persuasion”; and “increase text complexity.” ASCD, formerly the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, along with Grant Wiggins and Joseph McTighe, who developed a program for teaching called *Understanding By Design*, are working together to promote the Common Core. They believe it is a mistake to view Common Core as the same old thing repackaged with new ribbons. They argue that a close examination of the standards provides deeper insights into effective teaching. I am suspicious of their endorsement and those of many publishers and educational organizations because their glowing endorsement of Common Core is coupled with an effort to sell instructional videos, workshops for teachers, and printed material for use by students.

I have been skeptical about the arguments made in favor of Common Core. In *Huffington Post* columns I was critical of a tendency in Common Core to promote skill development and what I see as rote learning and test preparation at the expense of student mastery of content knowledge, approaches to problem solving, and conceptual understanding. Despite my reservations and disagreements, I lead staff development workshops where I show teachers how Common Core can be useful, though not a panacea for the problems of education. In this section I explore plusses and minuses in Common Core and invite you to join the discussion.

As a teacher educator I have been involved in endless hours of debate at faculty meetings, workshops for field supervisors, school-based staff development, and classes for pre-service teachers on the meaning of the new Common Core Standards,) and how to integrate them into secondary school curricula. Among other things, I learned that many teachers' organizations share my concerns. For example, at its annual meeting held in Saratoga Springs the weekend of March 23–25, 2012, the New York State Council for the Social Studies passed a series of resolutions condemning the national and state Common Core Standards for marginalizing social studies. The resolutions charged that attention to skills-based programs in math and reading left little

time or money in K-12 classrooms for effective instruction in social studies, citizenship, and history. The Council, in a move that I supported, demanded that New York State develop a new set of core standards that emphasize the teaching of social studies, citizenship, and history.

There is suspicion about the value of Common Core at the highest educational levels. The chief academic officer of New York City schools warned principals to be wary: “There’s lots and lots of books that have got fancy, pretty stickers on them saying ‘Common Core,’ but they actually haven’t changed anything in the inside” (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303674004577434430304060586.html>, Wall Street Journal Online (May 29, 2012). Textbook Sales Likely to Rise on New Rules).

Most of the better teachers I work with look at the Common Core Standards and say wearily, “What’s new? We already do that.” My response is, “Yes we do. But now we have to be more conscious about our classroom practices and how we will achieve our goals for student learning and more systematic in our planning and assessment of student performance. We also need to ensure that we coordinate instruction across the subject areas and grades.” Conscious decision making. Systematic planning. Coordinating instruction. For me, these are the key positive contributions of Common Core.

At their best, the Common Core Standards can draw the attention of teachers to the need for conscious decision making, systematic planning, and coordinated instruction as they work to develop student academic skills. If Common Core promotes a higher level of skill and understanding by students as they master content knowledge and formulate their own questions about a subject and the world, it performs a useful function and should be broadly supported. Imagine students reading *The Hunger Games* (2008) in ELA classes while discussing child labor and bondage in the world today in social studies; reading *Huckleberry Finn* (1994) in ELA while discussing censorship in China in social studies; reading the work of Mildred Taylor and *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960) in ELA while discussing the pre-Civil Rights era in the U.S. South; or *Europa, Europa* (1997) and *Survival at Auschwitz* (1995) by Primo Levi while learning about the European Holocaust.

During summer 2012, after a series of workshops with high school teachers on the usefulness of Common Core as a guide to instruction and curriculum, I started to say something else as well. Content area teachers have to turn Common Core on its head. The fundamental problem with Common Core, as many workshop participants saw it, is that it is conceptually backwards. Instead of motivating students to learn by presenting them with challenging questions and interesting content rooted in their interests and experiences, it removes substance from learning. According to *EngageNY*, a website that encourages New York State teachers and schools to incorporate Common Core in their curricula, content area teachers outside of ELA are supposed to emphasize literacy experiences instead of the subjects they are supposed to be teaching. Skill acquisition is at the forefront of instruction and assessment. As a result, the tendency is for skills to be decontextualized, which means they are taught and practiced divorced from meaning. If this happens, Common Core offers students no reason to learn.

The Common Core Standards, if they separate the learning of skills from content and understanding, point teachers in the wrong direction. State education departments and schools should not be allowed to devalue content area subjects such as the social studies and sciences and turn them into remedial classes where students practice reading, writing, and mathematical skills. Instead, language arts and math, the skills-based

classes, should be turned into resource centers that support student understanding of the world, of its history, economics, biology, the environment, literature, music, the arts, etc.

Literacy should not be viewed simply as a technical skill. According to noted Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, critical literacy requires reading and understanding both the world and the word so that people have the ability to use words to change the world. In this view, literacy is a necessary action for individual and societal freedom. Freire argues, and I agree, that interest in and the ability to “read the world” naturally precedes the ability to “read the word” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 23). When students are motivated to learn and want to discover new things about the world around them, skill acquisition comes easily. We learn to read the same way we learn to walk and talk. But when students are turned off by learning and boring classroom practices, they will never acquire more than rudimentary skills. Just think how many of us practiced musical scales on the piano before we developed any enjoyment of performing and how this approach to learning completely turned us off to a future in music.

The most common activity in a social studies classroom should be document analysis, with “document” defined broadly to include edited and unedited primary sources, written statements, transcribed speeches, photographs, pictures, charts, graphs, cartoons, and even material objects. To promote student literacy, a well-organized curriculum should have students read and write about primary source documents in their ELA classes while they are analyzing them and discussing their historical context in social studies.

I suggest a similar pairing between mathematics and science. Math is a language that allows us to describe certain things such as velocity, size, location, and ratios in great precision. Biology, chemistry, physics, and geology offer problems for students to explore while math provides them with the language to describe their experiments and conclusions.

Probably the most important concept in any of the sciences is cause and effect, and the most important tool in establishing cause and effect is the idea of balance. I think Newton expressed it best when he established three physical laws of motion in his *Principals of Mathematics*, which was first published in 1687. The third law postulates that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Action and reaction, two sides of the equation, are balanced.

All of Newton's laws can be expressed both in words and in the language of math. In fact, Newton invented calculus not to torment high school and college students, but to more precisely describe physical motion when objects were accelerating and decelerating at uneven rates.

I have always felt that algebra is the key to understanding all mathematics, that in fact it is math itself, with arithmetic only being a sub-set of algebra. In arithmetic, students balance two sides of an equation with all the numbers or known quantities on one side of the equal or balance sign. In algebra and other forms of more complex mathematics, the known and unknown quantities can be anywhere on either side of the balance or equal sign. There is a scene in the movie *Stand and Deliver* where Jaime Escalante pleads with one of his students to “fill the hole,” to balance the equation, to recognize that the positive and the negative of a number together must always equal zero. It is a very powerful scene. I had a similar “ah-ha” moment when I was helping my son study for a chemistry test. He was trying to memorize chemical formulas without success and I was not much help because I had the same problem with chemistry when I was in high school. Suddenly we

both realized that we were looking at algebraic equations and the key to every chemical formula was balancing both sides of the equation. The only difference was that energy was a new unknown; it had to either be added to one side to make the equation work or released on the other side after the chemicals bonded into a new compound.

I found an ally in my campaign to morph content, skills, and understanding in online videos by Dan Meyers, a former high school math teacher based in the San Francisco Bay area. Meyers argues in “Math class needs a makeover” that math classes need to focus on conceptualizing and solving problems rather than memorizing what for students are meaningless formulas

I believe Meyers' ideas fit in nicely with *The Algebra Project*, an approach developed by Bob Moses, a civil rights activist from the 1960s, who promotes the idea that all children can master math. In *The Algebra Project*, Moses lays out a five-step approach to teaching and understanding algebra. If it were up to me, I would write Moses' approach to pedagogy directly into the Common Core and mandate it, not only for mathematics instruction, but in every subject area. The five steps are:

1. Students participate in a physical experience, like a trip, where they see examples of what they are studying (e.g., arches, geometric shapes, suspension bridges).
2. Following the trip, students draw pictorial representations or construct models of what they have observed.
3. Next, they discuss and write about the event in their everyday dialect or intuitive language. Moses calls this stage “People Talk.”
4. Their oral and written reports are then translated into the standard dialect or structured language as part of “Feature Talk.”
5. In the last step, students develop symbolic or algebraic representations that describe what they have learned. They present these representations in class and explore how they can be used to describe other phenomena.

I use a similar approach in middle school social studies classes. I take students on a walking tour that includes the Brooklyn Bridge that connects the New York City boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn. From an overlook on the Brooklyn side of the bridge they “see” how the completion of the bridge in the late nineteenth century made possible one integrated city. They sketch the bridge, take photographs, and walk across it. When we return to class they construct and present model suspension bridges using their images. Expert groups prepare reports on the history of the bridge, the geography of New York City, the people who constructed it, and the technology involved in creating a suspension bridge. They work in teams to assist each other in formalizing their reports and translating them into “Feature Talk.” In the last step, students transform their reports into interactive electronic presentations.

The Algebra Project and the Meyers video reminded me of “math” experiences I had at a summer work camp for neighborhood teenagers from Brooklyn in the 1970s and 1980s. It illustrates the importance of real-world problem-solving as part of mathematics. I was working with teams of six teenagers and our goal was to re-roof cabins in the woods. We had to load 90-pound rolls of 3 foot by 50 foot tar paper on a flatbed truck, drive as close to the cabin as possible, carry the 90-pound rolls of tar paper to the cabin, and then carry 90-

pound rolls of tar paper up the ladder to the roof. I think you get my point. These were heavy rolls of tar paper.

I asked my work team how many rolls of tar paper they thought we needed for the roofing job and suggested we could calculate the amount we needed using geometry. They did not want to be bothered. It would be easier to carry the tar paper up to the roof than it would be to solve the problem, or so they thought.

By the time we got the rolls of tar paper to the work site they were rethinking their decision. It was hot and the tar paper was heavy. The first teen struggled getting up a few rungs of the ladder but finally made it. He called down “this is too hard. We better learn the math.” We measured the roof and then calculated exactly how many 3 foot by 50 foot rolls of tar paper we needed for the job. It was still hard getting them up the ladder, but we only took as many as we actually needed. Real-world math had triumphed over student resistance.

In the song “Kodachrome,” singer and composer Paul Simon complained about “all the crap” he learned in high school and wondered how he can still “think at all.” The lyrics to this song have always been among my favorites. Despite all the crap at highly regarded Bronx High School of Science that I attended in the 1960s, and there was plenty of it, I remember two good, at least interesting, academic experiences from high school. One happened in math and the other in social studies, but they share a common thread.

In 1965 I was in tenth grade. I was a solid “80” student without much effort, but I scored a 97 on the end-of-the-year New York State Geometry Regents. This must have set off some bells because I was called down to the math office and asked to explain a 17-step proof I devised for one of the problems, a problem that only required seven or eight steps. I looked at the two solutions, the officially recommended answer and mine, shrugged, and said “I guess I wasn't paying attention the day they went over that theorem in class.” I had not learned their way because I was not interested. But I liked an intellectual challenge so I invented my own way. Imagine teaching, imagine a world that instead of forcing students to routinely regurgitate our way, helped them discover their own ways of solving problems and doing things.

The following year in social studies we were studying U.S. history. My teacher argued the Declaration of Independence was the most perfect document ever written and challenged students in the class to find any mistake or vagueness. He offered five bonus points on the next report card as a reward.

Given my consistently less than stellar performance in high school, I was not that interested in the five points. What I really wanted was to find a “mistake or vagueness” and show up the top scorers in class. I spent the night reading and rereading the Declaration and one point stuck with me.

According to the second paragraph of the Declaration, to secure the inalienable rights of humankind, “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” The authors of the Declaration and the assembly that voted for independence from Great Britain, argued, “whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it....”

“The Right of the People” to rebellion was my vague point. Did the founders mean aggrieved parties could rebel even if they constituted a small minority? Was this right being granted to an educated elite, a simple

majority, or did the transformation of government require a unanimous or near unanimous vote? I concluded, and the teacher accepted my argument, that they were intentionally vague on this point because

- (a) they did not know how much support they really had for independence;
- (b) once in power, they did not want constant rebellions by the people that they would rule, especially by the lower classes; and
- (c) they owned enslaved Africans and were not offering them rights or human status and certainly not granting them the right to rebel against bondage and injustice.

Not only did the teacher award me the five points on my report card, but he also gave me a book by historian Carl Becker where Becker raised similar ideas.

(What I think these two instances have in common is that in both cases I responded to the challenge to solve a problem that for whatever reasons caught and held my interest. I could not have solved the problems without the “skills,” but I never invested in learning the skills until I was captivated by the problems.

My friend, colleague, and former student Pablo Muriel has demonstrated similar things in his work at University Heights High School in the Bronx. Pablo's “Participation in Government” students are involved in a range of political actions that are meaningful to their own lives. They fought to keep their school from being closed and as a result became active in citywide campaigns against school closings. They participated in Occupy Wall Street and helped organize an Occupy Fordham Road in the Bronx. They became community activists and organized a petition drive in the South Bronx against closing of local post offices. They became HIV/AIDS peer educators and produced videos promoting safe sex. And while they were doing these things they wrote, wrote, wrote about their ideas and experiences. Students with writing phobia and histories of poor school performance became proficient at developing and explaining their ideas orally and in writing. Many of these students have posted comments on my *Huffington Post* blogs. Many have defied expectations and gone on to college. Pablo is now documenting their progress as part of a literacy doctorate at Hofstra University. What Pablo and I believe, and what I am concerned that Common Core misses, is that students need reasons to invest in learning. It is hard work and they have to care about what they are doing. Students master skills best when they are using skills to discover things they really want to know. Meaningful learning is about problem solving, thinking, analyzing, organizing, and explaining, not rote memorization. In most cases skills are not learned independently of content and purpose.

In other words, Common Core will only make a significant difference in student performance when it recognizes the importance of motivating students to learn by engaging them in solving real problems where they can see the relationship to their lives. If it just pushes skills, it will not work.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION ON COMMON CORE

Questions to Consider:

1. Where do you stand in the debate over Common Core?
2. What elements of the standards do you find most useful?
3. Do you think this approach to teaching would have helped you to be a better student when you were in middle school and high school? Explain.

Online Additions

1. Draculas and Wolfmen Go to a Costume Party: My stepdaughter planned to return to school and was practicing for the standardized test known as the GRE. She kept on getting stumped by the math and called me for help with one particular sample problem. My solution to a particular problem illustrates how I think an approach to problem solving should precede skill acquisition.
2. Common Core Simplified: I still maintain a limited relationship with Edward R. Murrow High School where I taught in the early 1990s. I have visited the school to place and supervise participant-observers and student teachers. I also recommend the school to local families considering a high school for one of their children. The school has made a serious effort to have teachers incorporate Common Core guidelines in instruction and placed a simplified and useful version of New York State's formulation of Common Core on the school website. These guidelines are specifically tailored to the New York State ninth- and tenth-grade curriculum.

Section C: What Are Teaching Strategies?

There are as many possible strategies for teaching as there are for many other human activities. A football coach has to decide whether to emphasize the team's ground game or passing attack, taking into consideration the team's strengths and their opponent's weaknesses. When you go holiday shopping, you have to decide whether you want to visit a department store or specialty shop at the mall or perhaps go catalogue hunting or search for that elusive gift on the Internet. You weigh the trauma of traffic congestion versus the benefit of seeing products first hand.

For teachers, a key aspect of planning is deciding which approach or approaches are best suited for presenting a given subject to a specific groups of students. Teaching is not an abstract activity. It requires that teachers connect with adolescents who are not necessarily interested in making the connection. A chess champion or a football coach always goes into a match with a strategy, but the plan has to be flexible so the contestant can respond to an opponent. The need to be flexible and to respond to students is one of the things that makes it hard to discuss and plan hypothetical lessons. But every coach will tell you that you need practice, so in this section, let us try.

When I examine sample lesson plans prepared by pre-service teachers in my methods classes, they often contain a phrase such as: "Students will discuss blah, blah blah and yada, yada, yada." In the margins, I always write "HWTk?" How Will They Know? What have you presented to the class that makes it possible for them to discuss this topic?

As you decide on teaching strategies, you always need to consider two things: (1) How will students know? (2) What will students do? There are different ways to provide a class with information. The approaches that follow can be mixed together in different proportions.

Readings. Teachers provide students, either in class or as a homework assignment, with something to read—a page from the textbook, a passage from a novel, or a primary source document. Students can also be asked to "read" a picture, chart, or map to uncover information.

Modeling. Teachers provide students with a model problem and solution or an example of what you want them to draw, construct, or create. Sometimes the teacher models the activity for the class (e.g., sorting lab specimens by selected traits, solving a geometry problem, tracing a route on a map).

Direct instruction. Teachers outline and explain what they want students to know. A recording, either audio or video, can be substituted to provide information.

Dramatic presentation. Students act out a story or an event, either from a script or spontaneously from a scenario (role playing). The information garnered from the reenactment becomes the basis for discussion.

Allegories and anecdotes. A brief story or comparison is sometimes sufficient to allow students to scaffold on prior knowledge.

Brainstorming. Sometimes students are unaware they know something, or sometimes different students in the class know part of the puzzle. The class compiles, sorts, and analyzes a list of potentially useful

information.

Questioning. Many experienced teachers approach questioning as an art and are skilled at drawing information out of students and getting them to respond to each other. They use questions to assemble a pool of information to be further evaluated.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—TEACHING STRATEGIES

Questions to Consider:

1. Based on your own experience as a secondary school student, which teaching strategies did you find most effective in your own learning? Why?
2. In your opinion, would the effectiveness of a strategy depend on the group of students? Explain.

Section D: My Best Teachers: A Lesson in Humility

Many of my best teachers were my colleagues at middle schools and high schools. It can be a humbling experience to discover that you are not as good as you think you are at something you want to do well, and that other people are better at it than you are. That was my experience as a young teacher, and it continues to be my experience today. But being humbled is not necessarily a bad thing.

When you work at becoming a teacher, it takes between three and five years of hard work, planning, and practicing for the things that you want to happen in a lesson to actually happen on a consistent basis. It is easier to learn how to do these things when you appreciate the competence of other teachers, even teachers who do things differently than you do. I was a dynamo who entered teaching hoping to change the world. My lessons were fast paced; I taught with a sense of urgency. However, I soon learned that there were other ways of teaching and that caring teachers can be very effective even if they do not share my agenda.

I worked at Franklin K. Lane High School in New York City during most of the 1980s and was fortunate to work with a number of outstanding individuals. Lane could be a difficult place to work, and many teachers, including myself, had trouble maintaining control and teaching our classes. Emilie was a middle-aged White woman who was barely 5 feet tall. Her students, most of whom were Latino or African American, generally towered over her. As a teacher, Emilie can best be described as a “skilled craftsman.” Her lessons and her units were carefully laid out. Students respected her because they knew they could count on her to teach them in ways that they would understand and to prepare them for standardized tests and graduation requirements. She was always responsible and never yelled, or lost her patience or her poise. Barry was an “old school” teacher who demanded and received total attention and effort from students. In Barry's classes, students did the homework on time and they answered questions when called on. He had high expectations and no one ever said “NO!” to him. It was just the way things were. Rozella was every student's “dream” mother, organizing special activities and every other aspect of their lives. It was usually impossible to tell what was going on in Rozella's classes, probably because so many things were going on at the same time. Students sometimes seemed confused, but they were always patient with her. They cared about her and about learning because they knew she cared about them.

After I left Lane to work as a teacher educator, I had the opportunity to return to high school, teaching for a year at Edward R. Murrow High School. At Murrow, I worked with three extraordinary colleagues. Saul, about 60 years old, was the school's principal. He was a conscientious follower of John Dewey's philosophy of education and Socrates' method of teaching. Murrow, under Saul's direction, allowed students to spend unassigned periods sitting in the halls, studying, or hanging out with friends. Saul would continually walk through the halls, stopping repeatedly to squat down and chat with students. I do not think I ever heard Saul make either an affirmative or negative statement or raise his voice. It seemed that whatever students or faculty said, he always thought for a second and then responded with a question. Saul taught an advanced placement class that met an hour before school began in the morning. Every term it was overloaded with students, who voluntarily left home before dawn to travel to Murrow by bus or subway in order to take his class.

At Murrow, John, David, and I often used to plan lessons together. John was a devotee of the overhead projector at the time, although today he uses PowerPoint slides, and a short quote or newspaper headline.

David, who shared my proclivity for extended documents and activity sheets, was always clipping (downloading) articles from the newspaper. John had the ability, mid-lesson, to introduce a simple headline and use it to draw the entire class into heated discussion. Just when the discussion was dying down and everyone seemed swayed to the same position, another headline was slapped on the overhead and disagreement would erupt again. David's handouts were detailed, with readings of different lengths, maps, pictures, graphs, cartoons, and plenty of questions. He often reproduced an entire newspaper article because he wanted students to get used to reading and evaluating complex subject matter. David's knack was discovering and organizing a wide range of material with carefully constructed questions so that even when students stumbled over a difficult reading passage, they could figure out the meaning from the questions or the other materials.

As a field supervisor for student teachers, I have had the opportunity to visit the classrooms of many of my former teacher education students who have become cooperating teachers. A number of them have their secondary school students create elaborate individual and group projects to demonstrate what they have learned about a topic and as a form of authentic assessment. The cooperating teachers enjoy ushering me through the building and, with great pride, showing me what their classes have done. Inevitably, they thank me for teaching them how to do the projects. But the irony is, I really did not teach them these things. I did introduce the idea of a project approach to teaching and showed them some sample activities, but the projects were never as elaborate, and I was not as effective as they are working on projects with middle school and high school students. I shared my ideas with them, but the projects are the invention of these teachers and their students, not mine.

Frank Sinatra had a big hit song late in his career, "I Did It My Way." That song could be about any of these teachers. Each of them is or was outstanding. Each of them did it his or her own way.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—TEACHERS YOU ENJOYED

Questions to Consider:

Think of three secondary school teachers who you really enjoyed. How were they similar and how were they different? What strategies did they use as teachers? Why did you enjoy these approaches to teaching?

Section E: What Does a Lesson Look Like?

What Is a Lesson Plan?

- Lesson planning is part of the process of making pedagogical, intellectual, and ideological choices.
- Lesson planning is the process of figuring out the intermediate steps necessary to achieve long-term goals.
- Lesson planning includes researching information for your lesson.
- Lesson planning means deciding what the major ideas are that students need to consider during a lesson.
- Lesson planning involves translating abstract concepts into concrete examples that teenagers can critically examine, struggle to understand, decide to accept or reject, and use to reshape their own conceptions of the world.
- Lesson planning means making decisions about the most effective ways to organize classrooms and learning activities so students become involved as active learners.
- Lesson planning means thinking of creative ways to motivate students to explore topics that might not initially attract their interest, and thinking of questions that help them draw connections between ideas and events.
- There are a number of different ways to organize a lesson plan. Some school districts allow teachers to use the lesson design they are most comfortable with as long as their lessons are effective. Other districts require that teachers use a specific format. In that case, teachers learn to adjust the requirements to meet their personal needs. In this chapter, we examine five different ways to organize lessons: activity based, developmental, the Hunter approach, the workshop model, and a streamlined format I developed for overstressed student teachers.

What Do You Need to Consider?

- Lesson plans are necessary tools for teaching. They are not works of art. They will never be perfect.
- Lesson plan formats are suggestions based on other people's experiences. They are not etched in stone. What works for one person may not work for someone else or in another setting. There are a number of different ways to plan effective lessons.
- Successful teachers, even the most experienced, always plan. Some very good veteran teachers argue that they do not need written plans any more because everything is in their heads. It may be possible for them to teach this way and it may be possible for you in the distant future, but it has never worked for me. The effort to involve students in a lesson is too demanding for me to just rely on my memory during a lesson.
- Lesson plans are experiments. Sometimes they get the expected results and sometimes they do not. Every teacher has lessons that do not work in the way they expect. I try to include three or four possible activities in each lesson. If something does not seem to be working, I go on to the next activity.
- One of my students compared a lesson plan to a recipe. She said that when she first started cooking she

needed to follow all of the steps carefully. Later, as she became more experienced, she felt more comfortable varying the ingredients and experimenting with her own ideas. Lesson plans are a lot like recipes.

- It is better to over-plan than under-plan. An important part of teaching is making choices. You can always leave something out or decide to use it another day or in another way. As I became a more experienced teacher I over-planned on purpose.
- Lesson plans should change. If something does not work in one class, you can do it differently the next period, the next day, or the next year. At the end of a class or the day, I jot down comments on my lesson plans for future reference: what worked, what did not, what to add, drop, or change.
- Often lesson plan goals require more than one period to achieve. Just because time can be subdivided into discrete intervals does not mean that human beings think in 40-minute blocks or that every (or any) idea can be grasped in one class period.
- Structured plans make it possible to be flexible in class. You can choose from different built-in alternatives based on student involvement in the lesson. Maybe you cannot change a horse in “midstream,” but you can change a lesson.
- Lesson plans must be adjusted to meet particular circumstances and they need to be different for different students. A lesson that makes sense for a class of 15 may not work with a class of 34. A lesson planned for a class that meets in the morning probably has to be modified for a class that tears into the room at 2:30 pm. Lessons planned for heterogeneous classes will differ from lessons planned for homogenous classes. Lessons must be planned with students in mind.
- Lessons planned for middle school students differ from lessons planned for high school classrooms. Usually, middle school teachers have fewer time constraints. This makes it possible for students to approach an idea from different directions and for teachers to plan more group activities.
- Students are not inherently interested just because the clock says it is time for my class. It is my job to interest and motivate them.
- Lessons need clear structure. If students cannot figure out what I want them to do, they cannot do it.
- Sample lessons (including mine) may look great on paper, but teachers need to adapt them to their classes and their own personalities.
- The things that teachers need to include in lesson plans change as they become more experienced. A beginning teacher, knowing that he or she will be nervous, should list possible questions in advance. Preparation makes it easier to think on your feet. As I grew more experienced and confident, I became more adept at developing questions during the course of a lesson based on student questions and comments.
- Everyone can participate and learn if I organize a lesson around materials that I bring to class. If students did the homework in advance, their experience will be enriched. But even if they did not do the homework, they will be able to use the materials to participate in classroom activities and discussions.
- Whatever your individual preferences are for a lesson plan format, when you first start out, you will likely have to use the format recommended by your district or department. Beginning teachers are generally monitored closely until they establish a reputation for competence. I think you will discover

that whatever format you are asked to use, you will be able to adapt it to what you believe should be included in a lesson plan.

- Personal computers were probably invented with teachers in mind. I design lessons, modify them as worksheets, rearrange them into homework assignments, and recycle homework and classroom questions when I make up tests. The next time I teach the subject, I start with a lesson plan database that I can easily reorganize. In addition, the Internet is an abundant source of lesson ideas, lessons, and materials. Recommended sites are discussed in the section on technological literacy in [Chapter 7](#) and in an online appendix.

Section F: Five Sample Lesson Formats

Activity-Based Lesson Format

This is my preference for lesson design. An activity is broadly defined. It can mean examining a document, a problem, or a specimen. It can include reading, writing, drawing, building, talking, or singing. Activities can take a few minutes, a full period, or a number of days, though every day needs to start with an introduction and end with some type of closure.

Because this approach to lesson planning is organized around activities, by its nature it is hands-on, student centered, and promotes inquiry. I find it has other advantages as well. The activities draw on outside learning (e.g., projects and homework), but do not require prior knowledge. That means that every student has the ability to participate. Activities can be full class, group, or individual, which allows the teacher to rearrange the room around mid-lesson and keep students alert and on task. It also allows teachers time to work with individual students or student teams. Discussions, student presentations to class, and written work are incorporated into a number of activities, which allows teachers to continually assess student learning. A sample format for activity-based lessons is posted online (SM1).

Ingredients for an Activity-Based Lesson

Unit: Where this lesson fits in the overall conceptual sequence.

Aim: A question that a particular lesson is designed to answer or a statement or phrase introducing the topic of a lesson. Usually it is written on the board at the start of the lesson; sometimes it is elicited from students during the early stages of a lesson.

Goals/objectives (Common Core Standards): The skills, concepts, and content that students will learn during the lesson. Can also include social or behavioral or classroom community goals.

Main ideas/understandings: The underlying or most important ideas about a topic that inform a teacher's understanding and influence the way lessons and units are organized; the ideas that teachers want students to consider. They can be formulated as statements or as broad questions that become the basis for ongoing discussion.

Materials: The maps, documents, websites, laptops, Smart Board, and other equipment needed by teachers and students during the lesson to create the learning activities.

Activities/lesson development: The substance of the lesson; the ways that students will learn the goals and objectives. This can include discussions, document analysis, mapping, cartooning, singing, drama, research, cooperative learning, PowerPoint web design, and teacher presentations.

Do now: An introductory activity that immediately involves students as they enter the room.

Motivation: A question, statement, or activity that captures student interest in the topic that will be examined.

Questions: Prepared questions that attempt to anticipate classroom dialogue, designed to aid examination of materials, generate class discussions, and promote deeper probing. Medial summary questions make

it possible for the class to integrate ideas at the end of an activity.

Transitions: Key questions that make it possible for students to draw connections between the information, concepts, or understandings developed during a particular activity with other parts of the lesson and to broader conceptual understanding.

Summary: A concluding question or questions that make it possible for the class to integrate or use the learning from this lesson and prior lessons.

Assessment: How you measure whether students mastered goals/objectives and learned main ideas/understandings.

Application: Extra optional questions or activities planned for this lesson that draw on and broaden what students are learning in the unit. These can be used to review prior lessons or as transitions to future lessons.

Homework assignment: A reading, writing, research, or thinking assignment that students complete after the lesson. It can be a review of the lesson, an introduction to a future lesson, background material that enriches student understanding, an exercise that improves student skills, or part of a long-term project.

Sample Activity-Based Middle-Level English Lesson Developed by Maureen Murphy

Unit: Exploring Character in Literature

Aim question: How does a person's actions teach us about her or his character?

Goals/objectives (Common Core Standards): Explain the literal meaning of a passage, identify who was involved, what happened, where it happened, what events led up to these developments, and what consequences or outcomes followed.

Compare and contrast stories with similar themes. View information from a variety of perspectives. Translate images and ideas into different formats. Participate in interpersonal and group activities.

Main ideas/understandings: Acts of generosity to friends and strangers are important values in many cultures and religions.

Stories of hospitality are used to teach values.

Actions toward strangers, especially during hard times, reveal the character of individuals.

Hospitality stories are an important part of the cultural and literary legacy of famine-era Ireland.

Materials: Activity sheets with edited passages from "Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk" and "A Meal for a Stranger" [the activity sheet is posted online as SM2a]. Pencils, paper, and crayons.

Do now activity (Individual assignment):

Read an edited version of "Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk." Answer the following questions.

1. Why was Mrs. Fitzgerald well known?
2. What happened that surprised Mr. Fitzgerald?
3. What is the lesson or moral of this story?

Motivation activity (Full-class discussion):

Did you or someone you know ever do a good deed for someone else? Tell us about the good deed and why you did it. How did this act of generosity make you feel? Why?

Transitional question: Do you feel generosity is an important value to teach children? Explain.

Lesson activities (Full-class and group assignments):

- Teacher reads aloud “Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk.”
- Students should write down words that describe Mrs. and Mr. Fitzgerald.
- Why was Mrs. Fitzgerald well known? Why did Mr. Fitzgerald want to keep all of the milk? What happened that surprised Mr. Fitzgerald?
- Make a list of terms that describe Mrs. and Mr. Fitzgerald on the board. Which of the Fitzgeralds would you rather have as a neighbor? Why?
- What is the lesson or moral of this story?
- Introduce the story “A Meal for a Stranger.” It is from a time in Ireland known as the Great Hunger when the potato crop failed repeatedly and there was much starvation.
- Discuss the terms starvation and famine. Is there hunger and famine in the world today? What can we do about it? Would you share your food if you had very little but a stranger had none? Explain.
- Working in pairs or teams of four, students should read and discuss an edited version of “A Meal for a Stranger” and answer the following questions.
 1. Whom did the woman find in her kitchen?
 2. What difficult decision did she make?
 3. What is the lesson or moral of this story?
 4. How are the two stories similar and different?
- Discuss “A Meal for a Stranger.” What is the lesson or moral of this story? How are the two stories similar and different? Which story do you find more effective at showing the character of the people? Explain. Which story do you find more effective at teaching the value of generosity? Explain.

Key questions:

How do acts of generosity make you feel? Why?

Do you feel generosity is an important value to teach children? Explain. Which of the Fitzgeralds would you rather have as a neighbor? Why? Would you share your food if you had very little but a stranger had none? Explain.

Which story do you find more effective at showing the character of the people? Explain.

Which story do you find more effective at teaching the value of generosity? Explain.

Summary questions:

How did these stories teach us about the character of these two women? How do they teach readers

important social values?

Assessment:

Exit ticket. Students working individually write the answers to the following questions and submit their responses for evaluation.

1. How are the stories “Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk” and “A Meal for a Stranger” similar and different?
2. Which story do you find more effective at showing the character of the people? Explain.
3. Which story do you find more effective at teaching the value of generosity? Explain.

APPLICATION:

Draw a picture illustrating characters and scenes from one of the texts that shows how actions reveal character. Be prepared to explain your drawing to the class (Note: Depending on time, drawings will be presented in this lesson or the next day).

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT:

Complete your drawings. Write a poem or brief story where someone's actions reveal the person's character. Be prepared to share your drawing and writing with the class.

Developmental Lesson Format

The developmental lesson is designed to teach about a major concept, event, or relationship, and it is tailored to one lesson period. A lesson has an aim, in the form of either a question or a statement that defines the topic for the day. Sometimes a teacher will open the lesson with the aim already written on the board and sometimes the aim question or statement will be elicited from students during a motivation. Key to the developmental lesson is systematic questioning designed to achieve specific learning objectives. Carefully constructed questions are used to draw information from students in order to develop an outline of notes on the board. Generally, a model outline is available in advance. Medial summary questions are used to help students summarize learning at crucial points in the lesson. By the end of the lesson, multiple students answer the aim question or, if it is a statement, a question based on it. Medial summary questions, final summary questions, and applications are also used to assess student understanding. A sample format for a developmental lesson is posted online (SM3).

Ingredients for a Developmental Lesson

Aim: A question that a particular lesson is designed to answer or a statement or phrase introducing the topic of a lesson. Usually it is written on the board at the start of the lesson. Sometimes it is elicited from students during the early stages of a lesson.

Performance objectives (Common Core Standards): Specific content and skills students are expected to master by the end of the lesson. Lessons usually have between three and five objectives.

Preparation: Prior classroom instruction or homework that prepares student for this lesson.

Development: Outline of the actual lesson.

Motivation: An introductory question that reviews prior preparation and establishes the topic that will be examined.

Questions: Prepared in advance and narrowly focused. Designed to elicit information from students based on prior preparation.

Notes: Information obtained from students is translated into a detailed outline that is placed on the board.

Medial summary questions: Promote deeper probing and classroom dialogue. Used to monitor student progress toward achieving objectives during the lesson.

Final summary question: Based on the aim question, it integrates material from the entire lesson and allows teacher to assess student understanding and achievement of objectives.

Assessment: How you measure whether students mastered goals/objectives and learned main ideas/understandings.

Application: Extra optional question(s) that draws on and broadens what students are learning in the unit. These can be used as review, additional assessment, or as transitions to future lessons.

Homework: Independent work that scaffolds on the lesson to prepare students for the next lesson.

Sample Developmental Mathematics Lesson Developed by Rhonda Eisenberg

Aim question statement:

How can we use similar triangles to solve problems?

Performance objectives (standards):

1. Review the relationship between corresponding sides and angles of similar triangles.
2. Apply the properties of similar triangles to find the heights of various figures.
3. Solve the problems involving indirect measure using similar triangles.

Preparation:

1. PREVIOUS HOMEWORK: Problems from textbook on properties of similar triangles.
2. PREVIOUS LESSON: What are the properties of similar triangles?

Development:

Motivation question:

In a summer camp a dead tree had to be cut down. The tree stood 16 yards from the recreation hall. Since the tree was leaning in the direction of the recreation hall, it seemed best to let it fall in that direction. Would it hit the building? What do you think? How would you figure out if the tree would hit the recreation hall?

Format for Hunter's Approach to Lesson Planning

A number of school districts across the country have adopted a seven-step lesson design that is part of the

“Madeline Hunter Teacher Effectiveness Training Program.” This design, which is intended to be applicable in all subject areas, tries to systematize lesson planning. In theory, it makes it easier for teachers to plan and for students to follow the development of a lesson and ensures that teachers have clear learning objectives for their students that are achievable by the end of the instruction period. Each section of the lesson plan may include questions that the teacher uses to measure student understanding up until that point. A sample format for a Hunter approach is posted online (SM4).

Table 3.2 QUESTIONS/NOTES/MEDIAL QUESTIONS

<i>QUESTIONS</i>	<i>NOTES (OUTLINE)</i>
1. What mathematical principles can help solve this problem? 2. What is the relationship between similar triangles? 3. Once we know that two triangles are similar, what is the relationship between corresponding sides? 4. What is the relationship between corresponding angles?	1. When two triangles are similar, corresponding sides are in proportion. 2. When two triangles are similar, corresponding angles are congruent. 3. If we have information about the sides of one of the similar triangles, we can calculate information about the second triangle.
MEDIAL SUMMARY	How can the properties of similar triangles help us discover the heights of very tall objects?
QUESTIONS	NOTES (OUTLINE)
1. How can we indirectly measure the height of the dead tree using a similar triangle? 2. If a five foot tall girl casts a shadow four feet long at the same time as the tree casts a shadow twenty feet long, how tall is the tree?	1. Draw and label a diagram showing the triangles made by the girl and her shadow and the tree and its shadow, 2. Translate the diagram into mathematical notation and solve the problem. ($5 : X = 4 : 20$); ($4X = 100$); ($X = 25$)
FINAL SUMMARY QUESTION	How can the properties of similar triangles help us solve the problem of the dead tree?
ASSESSMENT	Assign students additional problems to solve individually from the textbook. Students exchange and grade papers.
APPLICATION	Volunteers place additional problems on the board. Class reviews solutions.
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT	Assignment from textbook using properties of similar triangles to solve problems.

Ingredients for Hunter's Approach to Lesson Planning

Anticipatory set: A brief opening activity or a statement that focuses student attention on what they will be learning.

Objectives (Common Core Standards): A detailed list of what students will know or be able to do at the end of the instruction period. It includes information that a teacher provides to students about what they will be able to do at the end of the lesson and how the lesson is relevant to their learning.

Instructional input: Information that a teacher provides students so they can perform a skill or complete a process—questions that a teacher asks to ensure that students understand procedures.

Modeling the information: The teacher leads the class in an activity so students understand what they are supposed to do.

Checking for understanding: Teachers ask questions and examine student work to ensure that students possess the essential information and skills necessary to achieve the instructional objective.

Guided practice: Teachers assist students as they work on assignments to ensure that student efforts are accurate and successful.

Independent practice (assessment): Students have mastered the basic skills and understandings needed to complete activities without direct teacher intervention. This is the final measure of whether lesson objectives have been achieved. This can also include a homework assignment.

Sample Hunter Approach Middle-Level Science Lesson Developed by S. Maxwell Hines

Anticipatory set: Students will

1. Examine a period on a page.
2. Measure the size of the period and hypothesize how many microorganisms could be contained on the period.
3. Discuss ways to confirm their hypotheses.
4. Discuss the function of a microscope.

Objectives (Common Core Standards):

Students will

1. Identify the component parts of the microscope with an accuracy of 90%.
2. Produce drawings of slides viewed under the microscope with an accuracy of 90%.
3. Calculate the size of microorganisms based on the use of the microscope with an accuracy of 90%.

Instructional input:

The teacher will

1. Review safety rules for classroom equipment, including the proper care, transport, and storage of

microscopes and slides.

2. Examine a diagram of the parts of a microscope with students.
3. Have students hypothesize the purpose of each component as it is introduced.
4. Carefully explain the concepts surrounding magnification and scale, as these concepts tend to cause confusion in novice learners.
5. Confirm or correct students' hypotheses.

Modeling:

The teacher will

1. Model the steps needed to use the microscope to identify bacteria on a period.
2. Display a list of the steps needed to use a microscope.

Check understanding:

The teacher will

1. Have students hone their basic microscopy skills by giving them a series of slides to view and draw. If students are familiar with the materials they are viewing under the microscope, have them diagram their drawings. (This provides the teacher with the initial assessment of appropriate microscopy use.)
2. Circle around the room and assist each student in developing her or his microscopy skills.
3. Ask a series of questions of struggling students to identify the step at which they begin having trouble.
4. Guard against doing the work for the student. Students must be allowed to struggle a bit in order to learn proper microscopy.
5. Evaluate student drawings to make sure they know how to use the microscope before proceeding.
6. Close lesson with review of lesson and preview of next lesson.

Guided practice:

Students will

1. Examine an area the size of a period under low power and high power using a slide containing microorganisms.
2. Draw what they see under each power setting.
3. Count the number of organisms they see within an area the size of the period.
4. Review and integrate calculations, paying special attention to using estimation as a guide to evaluating the accuracy of answers.

Independent practice (assessment): Students will

1. As a homework assignment, calculate the size of the organisms they saw using the size of the

- period they identified in class.
2. For additional credit, identify the specific types of organisms they saw and diagram their drawing.

Format for a “Workshop Model” Lesson Plan

What has come to be known as the “Workshop Model” for teaching was originally developed as a way to promote literacy in young children. In this approach, teachers model activities for the class and confer with and assess individual students while they work cooperatively in groups and individually to master specific skills. Every “Workshop Model” lesson uses the same procedure. It starts with a five-to-ten-minute mini-lesson with the teacher introducing the class to the topic for the day, usually by promoting a full class discussion. Next, the teacher models the day's task for students for approximately five minutes, showing them how to analyze a quote, map, chart, graph, or cartoon. After Teacher Modeling, students work, either individually or in groups, to complete tasks for 20 to 25 minutes. This is called Work Time. During this phase of the lesson, teachers circulate around the room conferring with and assisting students and assessing their performances. Following Work Time, the full class regroups in Community Time for student presentations or teacher-led discussion. The lesson concludes with a 5- to 10-minute Closing where teachers ask questions to further assess student mastery of ideas and skills. A sample format for a workshop model lesson is posted online (SM5).

Sample Spanish Language Middle School Workshop Model Lesson Plan

Introducing the topic: Class watches a Spanish language weather report and discusses the day's weather and the forecast of the weather for the week using appropriate vocabulary.

Teacher modeling: Teacher uses a list of vocabulary words to write a weather report and forecast.

Work time: Student teams receive different cards with selected vocabulary words to use in writing a weather report and forecast. Students illustrate their weather reports and forecasts.

Community time: Student teams present their weather reports and forecasts.

Closing: Teacher asks questions to promote further explanation and to assess the language command of all team members.

Assessment: A written assessment of whether students mastered goals/objectives and learned main ideas/understandings.

Format for a Streamlined Activity-Based Lesson Plan

Student teachers are often overwhelmed by lesson planning, especially once they become responsible for a full teaching program. In our reflective practice seminar for student teachers we played around with ideas for a simplified, minimalist format for activity-based lessons. It is organized around questions that basically ask, “What do you want to achieve in this lesson?” and “How will you do it?” A sample format for a streamlined activity-based lesson plan is posted online (SM6).

Ingredients for a Streamlined Social Studies Lesson Plan

Unit: Where does this lesson fit in the curriculum?

Lesson: What topic or skill will students learn in this lesson?

Standards: What student skills will be introduced or reinforced during this lesson?

Main ideas: What are the main ideas (maximum of three) students need to know about this topic?

Materials: What materials (e.g., activity sheet, map, song) will I use to present information and teach academic skills?

Aim: What overall question am I asking the class to answer?

Do now: What activity, if any, will I use to settle students and establish a context?

Motivation: How will I open the lesson and capture student interest?

Activities: What activities will I use to help students discover what they need to learn?

Key questions: How will I summarize and assess student learning?

Assessment: How will I measure student mastery of the skills, content, and concepts taught in this lesson?

Homework: What must students learn on their own to reinforce what we did in this lesson or to introduce the next topic?

Follow-up: What topics come next?

Sample Streamlined High School Social Studies Lesson Plan

Unit: The Growth of Sectionalism—the Antebellum South

LESSON: Lives and hopes of enslaved Africans in the American South

1. What are the main ideas (maximum of three) students need to know about this topic?

Traditional songs are primary sources that help historians understand the lives and dreams of ordinary people.

Enslaved Africans experienced slavery as oppressive and wanted freedom.

Songs from the era of slavery express the dreams and aspirations of enslaved Africans.

2. What student skills will be introduced or reinforced during this lesson?

Students will uncover and analyze the experience of enslaved Africans in the American South based on information presented in written documents and songs.

What materials (e.g., activity sheet, map, song) will I present? Activity Sheet: African American Songs from the Era of Slavery [posted online SM2b]; recordings.

What question will I ask the class to answer (aim)? How do songs express the dreams and aspirations of Africans enslaved in the United States?

4. What activity, if any, will I use to settle students and establish a context (do now)? Read “All the Pretty Little Horses” and answer questions 1–3.

5. How will I open the lesson (motivation) and capture student interest? How can we learn about the ideas and feelings of ordinary people from the past? Brainstorm a list of ideas on the board.
5. What activities will I use to help students discover what they need to learn (activities)? Read the lyrics to the songs and listen to recordings. The first song is a do now for individuals. Groups will analyze and report on the other two songs.
7. How will we summarize and assess student learning (key questions)? What does this song tell us about the experience of enslaved Africans? What does this song tell us about the lives and hopes of enslaved Africans in the American South?
8. What must students learn on their own to reinforce what we did in this lesson or to introduce the next topic (homework)? Read pages xxx. Answer questions 1–4 on page xxx. Take one of the three songs and rewrite it as a “rap.” Be prepared to perform your version in class.
9. What topics come next (follow-up)? Tomorrow: Slave resistance; After: Debate over slavery.

Section G: Becoming a Teacher: What Makes Someone Successful as a Teacher?

I Will Not Let the Wheelchair Be an Excuse

By Dennis Mooney

When Dennis was 21, he broke his neck in a diving accident. Since then, he has moved around using a wheelchair. As a teenager, Dennis was an indifferent student. After he was injured, he had to relearn the ordinary tasks of daily living and figure out what he wanted to do with his life. He feels that the two things that have been his greatest assets in becoming a teacher are his memories of being an indifferent student and his experience of overcoming his disability. He remembers how other student teachers complained during seminars how hard it was to learn how to teach. Dennis never complained. For him, "teaching a classroom of teenagers is difficult," but "it is easy compared to being paralyzed." When he wrote this essay, Dennis was 34 years old and in his second year as a high school teacher. — Alan Singer

As a high school and college student I was academically strong but very lazy. I was the same way in swimming. My coach thought if I took time to do my strokes properly and practice I could be good, but I never liked to practice that much. I did not have the determination. I had attended a community college on and off for two years before I had my accident while diving. My dream was to make lots of money, but I was never motivated to achieve it.

After the accident, I was in the hospital for nine months—two weeks in an intensive care unit and the rest of the time in rehabilitation. At the start, I figured my paralysis was temporary. When I was first injured I could not move anything from my neck down. Slowly, I started to get movement back in my arms and the doctors were surprised. When you cannot move your arms up and down, and then you can, it is a big thing. My friends used to hold a soda can up for me to sip from and one day I lifted it myself; I was so excited I let go of the can and I spilt it all over my lap. I thought the progress would continue, but at a certain point it stopped. In occupational therapy they were trying to teach me how to do things differently, and I kept telling them that I did not have to learn because I was not going to be in a wheelchair for the rest of my life. I planned to take the police officers exam.

Today, many young people with paralysis wait for a miracle cure instead of going on with their lives. Part of the problem is that they are released from rehabilitation programs much too quickly. The idea is that people should resume their regular lives, but you cannot go back to who you were before. You may be physically ready for the outside world, but that does not mean you are mentally and emotionally ready. I needed nine months to accept what had happened to me and to adjust to it. I was lucky I had a support network of friends who pushed me to try things. A year after the accident they had me back in the water.

When I got out of "rehab," I knew I had to go to school and be serious about it. A friend from college brought me to see one of our professors and he encouraged me to start school right away that summer. I was not ready yet, but I began in the fall. It was a good decision. If I had waited longer, I might not have gone back.

While I was in the hospital I discovered that I liked working with children. There were little kids in the hospital in wheelchairs that were being taught to walk. I was always amazed as they wheeled up and down the hallways laughing. Being in a wheelchair was the normal thing for them. They would cry every

time adults made them get out of their chairs. I realized the medical staff did not really understand the way the children felt, so I tried to help them learn to walk by coaxing them out of their wheelchairs.

When I started at a four-year college, I met a history teacher who kept asking questions and he got me to think about things I had never considered before. I finished an economics degree, rejected the idea of working on Wall Street, and thought I might want to become a college professor. A friend reminded me how much I liked working with children and I made a spur-of-the-moment decision to enter a graduate program in teacher education.

I know I am disabled, that I am handicapped, and my solution is to overcompensate. I will not ask for any special consideration at work because I do not want people to think I cannot do the job. I will not let the wheelchair be an excuse for me. The day I went to take the teacher certification test there was an ice storm, the sidewalks were not cleared, and I could not get out of my van. Almost every person who took that test was dropped off by someone else. I would not let anyone take me, so I missed the test.

My philosophy of life and teaching is that nothing is worth freaking out over. While teaching a classroom of teenagers is difficult, it is easy compared to being paralyzed. If I have a problem in a class, I have to figure out a solution. I had to figure out how to shave, how to brush my teeth again, how to feed myself. If I can do these things, I know I can find a solution to a teaching problem.

When I started student teaching I had an entire monologue figured out about what I was going to say to students about being in a wheelchair. I began the opening lesson, "As you can see I am in a wheelchair and I can't write on the board, so we will have to work together in this class." I was so nervous, that was the end of my speech.

My first semester as a regular teacher, I told students, "This class is not about my being in a wheelchair. I am your teacher. I just happen to be in a wheelchair. If you have any questions, you are free to ask me those questions after class." During the term, only three students spoke with me about it. The next time around, I did not even bring the topic up. I figured when they walked into class, they saw I was in a wheelchair. At this point, most of the kids had seen me in the building or heard about me and they knew who I was.

There are teachers who react to my being in a chair and they have made comments that betray their prejudices, but I do not really care what others think any more. That is their problem, not mine. After a year of teaching, the school assigned me to teach the advanced placement economics classes. Obviously, my supervisors thought I was qualified to do it. I was even nominated for an award as an economics teacher.

People ask me how I adjust my teaching to being in a wheelchair. The fact is I never had to adjust because I was always in a chair. I never taught any other way. The people who have to adjust are my students, so I try to find ways to help them. The big difference for students is note taking. I never use the board and I rarely use transparencies. I tell students that in my class they will learn to figure out what is important and that I will help them. I have had about 850 students since I started teaching and only three have complained that they were having trouble. I told each of them that I understood their problem and I would try to be more systematic and give them a signal when to take notes. Now I tell

classes, "When I repeat something, that is your signal that it is important. The second time I say something you better start writing." Some classes are really good about it. In other classes, I have to repeat things three or four times.

Beginning teachers worry a lot about controlling their classes. I am not sure how I control the class. I just go in and I am who I am. I treat students with respect and I expect to be treated the same way. I tell students, "I can be your best friend or your worst enemy—I hope to be your best teacher, but that is up to you. If you do not want to do the work, I cannot force you to, but I will not allow you to disrupt the learning of others." My first term, when students were noisy, I would threaten them with a quiz. I ended up bringing home stacks of papers to read. It aggravated me when I realized the only person being punished was me. Now I sit in class and wait. I say, "Whenever you are ready," and they get quiet. My latest technique is to shake my wrist and I tell them to all shake their wrists. When they ask why, I say "You are going to be doing a lot of writing and you need to warm up so you do not get cramps." Now, when they are not paying attention, I shake my wrist and they pay attention. Respecting students means giving them credit for being intelligent. Because I was a "65 student," I understand what is going on in class and this helps me figure out ways to get them to learn.

I do not have a lot of rules, but the ones I have, I expect to be obeyed. Once a community is established in class you can pull back, but you have to start with consistent rules. If students have too much freedom at the beginning, it is impossible to take it back. My first term, a student complained that I kept changing the rules. He said, "We don't know what you want." I got mad at him, but then I realized he was right. All teachers have to learn how to be the teacher. When you screw up, you will have to live with it. The beauty of teaching is you get to fix your mistakes when you have a new set of students. I learned in life that you can fix things and that there are things in life that are more important than who got the highest score on the test.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES

Frank Bowe (1947–2007) was the head of the special education program at Hofstra University and a nationally known advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. He believed that what is most remarkable about Dennis is not that he teaches from a wheelchair, but that he really wants to be a teacher and it shows every day. Frank argued “Dennis is doing what he wants to do and he is paying a high price in a lot of ways to do it. The wheelchair is secondary to this joy he derives from teaching.”

Questions to Consider:

1. In your view, what qualities make Dennis a successful teacher?
2. How did Dennis figure out how to be successful in the classroom?
3. Were his life experiences handicaps or sources of strength as Dennis became a teacher? Explain.
4. What aspects of his approach to teaching do you agree with or disagree with? Explain.
5. If you were on a school's hiring committee and knew about Dennis' condition, would you recommend interviewing him for a job or hiring him? Explain.

Section H: What Is Thematic Teaching (in Social Studies, Biology, and Everything Else)?

In his essay (posted online C2c), David Morris speaks about presenting a “package” that allows students to discover the underlying “story.” I like to call this idea thematic teaching. As a high school social studies teacher, I used the first few lessons of the new school year to establish themes that classes would be exploring throughout the curriculum. Although I did this in different ways over the years, my favorite way involved getting students to define the essential questions they wanted to study, questions that I would then integrate into units, projects, and lessons.

To start, I distributed newspapers and news magazines to teams of students who were assigned to select articles that they believed signaled important issues facing the contemporary world. Teams had to write down the headlines of the articles and their reasons for selecting them. At the end of day 1, I asked at least one group to report on their deliberations, then listed the topics of their articles on poster paper.

On the second day, the rest of the groups reported and we listed the topics of every article. After the presentations, students categorized the issues, identified underlying problems raised by the news articles, and discussed questions they wanted to answer during the year. Articles on racial discrimination, sexual harassment, and police brutality led to questions such as, “Can the United States become a more just society?” Topics such as welfare reform, health care, unemployment, tax breaks, and crime prompted students to ask, “What is the responsibility (or job) of government?” Other questions developed by students have included, “Should the United States be the world’s police force?” and “Is technology making the world a better place?” These essential questions were placed on poster boards and hung prominently around the room. Students took pride in the questions they came up with, and the activity increased their willingness to participate in class and furthered our exploration of social studies and history.

Pre-service teachers I work with in general methods classes and new teachers in the Hofstra New Teachers Network often accept that this type of thematic teaching can work in social studies, but doubt whether it is possible in other disciplines, especially when teachers are confronted with the requirement that they prepare their students for end-of-the-year standardized assessment tests. The idea that follows developed out of a conversation among Robyn Tornabene, a biology teacher at Long Beach High School on Long Island, New York; S. Maxwell Hines, the science coordinator at Hofstra University; and myself at a New Teachers Network meeting.

The final two paragraphs of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859/1964) summarize what he calls “this view of life.” Harvard paleontologist and evolutionary biologist Stephen J. Gould used an exploration of Darwin’s view of life as the basis for essays written for the general reader and published in *Natural History* magazine from 1974 through January 2001.

Most secondary school biology teachers I have talked with teach biology as a series of semiautonomous units with a tremendous amount of hard-to-remember detail. They find some students lap it up, whereas others, the majority, either struggle with memorization of seemingly random facts or else give up trying and just muddle through the year.

I believe that Darwin’s ideas on the evolution of life on earth, as explored by Gould, provide fundamental

themes that pervade the biology curriculum and can help teachers and students make sense out of what they are studying. I propose that the entire biology curriculum be used to establish and test Darwin's view of the fundamental relationship between all living things, what Gould calls the “fact of evolution,” and the mechanisms for change over time, what Gould identifies as theories that explain evolutionary development. Every unit in the curriculum can address the question, “How does this topic (e.g., the human circulatory system, the nervous system of a frog, environmental problems, the origin of disease) support or challenge Darwin's view of life?” As they approach each new field of study, students explore fundamental similarities and differences between living things in the past and present, the basis for ordering information (taxonomy), and the scientific method for establishing knowledge.

As a final assessment project for “this view of biology,” classes can create their own natural history museum. Individual students or student teams would prepare exhibits and reports that question or support Darwin and Gould and elaborate on their own understanding of the science of life.

Some teachers are concerned that placing Darwin and evolution at the center of the biology curriculum will subject them to challenge by religious opponents of evolution and by supervisors worried about test results. The best answer I can come up with is that we do not expect students to understand geometry without understanding its basic axioms, the physical universe without understanding its underlying laws, chemistry without the periodic table, music without notation and scales, or language without grammatical structure. These are fundamental for understanding the entire structure of the discipline. In the same way, evolution explains biology. To help you consider this idea for a thematic approach to biology (or any subject area), carefully examine the passage from the conclusion to Charles Darwin's 1859 book, *Origin of Species* (pp. 488–490).

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—CHARLES DARWIN'S ORIGIN OF SPECIES

When I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings ... they seem to me to become ennobled. Judging from the past, we may safely infer that not one living species will transmit its unaltered likeness to a distant futurity. And of the species now living very few will transmit progeny of any kind to a far distant futurity; for the manner in which all organic beings are grouped, shows that the greater number of species of each genus, and all the species of many genera, have left no descendants, but have become utterly extinct. We can so far take a prophetic glance into futurity as to foretell that it will be the common and widely-spread species, belonging to the larger and dominant groups, which will ultimately prevail and procreate new and dominant species. As all the living forms of life are the lineal descendants of those which lived long before,... we may feel certain that the ordinary succession by generation has never once been broken, and that no cataclysm has desolated the whole world. Hence we may look with some confidence to a secure future of equally inappreciable length. And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection.

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws, taken in the largest sense, being Growth with Reproduction; inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the indirect and direct action of the external conditions of life, and from use and disuse; a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less-improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows.

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

Questions to Consider:

1. Make a list of what you consider the main ideas presented in the passage. Explain whether you agree or disagree with each of these ideas. Note that contemporary scientists do not embrace all of Darwin's conceptions about the mechanism of evolution.
2. Discuss whether Darwin's "view of life" helps you better understand the study of biology.
3. Discuss whether, in your view, thematic teaching offers a useful alternative to listing and explaining relatively unrelated topics and information in your own field.
4. A picture can be worth a thousand words, or at least illustrate what you think you know. Draw a picture of Darwin's view of life as you understand it. Compare it with others. Are differences in

the pictures reflections of your views or Darwin's?

The following is my list of Darwin's main ideas.

- “I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings.”
- “The greater number of species of each genus, and all the species of many genera, have left no descendants, but have become utterly extinct.”
- “It will be the common and widely-spread species, ... which will ultimately prevail and procreate new and dominant species.”
- “Natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection.”
- “Elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.”
- “From so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

Online you will find what I consider to be some useful ideas for organizing lessons (SM7), outlines for the different lesson plan formats presented in this chapter (SM1, 3, 4, 5, and 6), sample activity sheets for activity-based lessons (SM2), and sample high school mini-lessons (SM8) for physics, introductory Italian, an English class studying Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*, and an introductory algebra class.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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4

RELATIONSHIPS: WHY ARE RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS CRUCIAL TO SUCCESSFUL TEACHING?

This chapter explores supportive teacher-student relationships that are part of a general approach to teaching. Gloria Ladson-Billings, Lisa Delpit, Michelle Fine, and Nel Noddings are among a number of educators who have written about the importance of emotional connections between teachers and students. In *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Ladson-Billings (2009) studied the qualities that made a multiracial group of teachers successful working with African American students. A key element of what she describes as “culturally relevant pedagogy” is the ability of these teachers to care about and connect to their students. Delpit (1995) is concerned that teachers reject working-class, poor, and minority youth because their perceptions of proper behavior and ways of learning are based on their own class and cultural backgrounds. Fine (1991) argues that in an irrational world where students are sometimes demeaned by school authorities, dropping out may be the only rational choice some students can make. Noddings (1984, 1992) offers a philosophy of education based on an “ethic of caring.”

In “My Best Teachers,” I describe how I learned to be a teacher from relationships with my students. Other sections examine ways of “seeing” students and what schools mean by gifted education. A concluding section examines a statement about education by James Baldwin, a noted African American author, who invited teachers to participate in a movement to transform the world.

Section A: How Important Are Relationships Between a Teacher and Students?

In May 2001, Johanna Grussner took 24 members of an elementary school gospel choir to perform in her hometown in Finland. The fifth and sixth graders were from an innercity American neighborhood with a large immigrant population. Many of the children had histories of academic and behavioral problems in school. The trip, which was reported in the national press, was the culmination of two years of hard work by both the students and their teachers.

The consensus among parents, teachers, administrators, and the children themselves was that their experience in the chorus had transformed students. Yet transformation can be a fragile thing. Soon after the trip, Ms. Grussner announced she had a chronic illness and would leave the school and her chorus to return home permanently. Threatened by the loss of their relationship with Ms. Grussner, old patterns of school behavior reemerged among some of the children and at least one of the lead performers was threatened with being held over (Hartocollis, 2001a, 2001b).

The story of Johanna Grussner and the gospel choir is not a unique story. The impact of caring relationships on students and the frailty of transformation if these relationships falter have been described in popular movies such as *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *The King and I* (1956), *Stand and Deliver* (1988), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), *Playing from the Heart* (2000), and *Freedom Writers* (2007). Each of these movies tells the story of a teacher who connected with students emotionally and was able to build on the connection to change the way they functioned in school and in the world.

Perhaps the leading proponent of the importance of relationship in teaching is the feminist philosopher and psychologist Nel Noddings. In the conclusion to *Caring, A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984, p. 197), Noddings argues for reorganizing schools based on an “ethic of caring” and a “maternal attitude.” In such a school, “rules are not sacred, ... what matters is the student” (p. 178), and the most important task of the teacher is to model what it means to be a moral caring human being.

Noddings explains, “[a] teacher cannot ‘talk’ this ethic. She must live it, and that implies establishing a relation with the student” (1984, p. 179). Noddings’ approach is similar to John Dewey’s idea, discussed in [Chapter 1](#), that effective teachers connect subject matter to the lived experience of their students and create classrooms where experience is a crucial element of curriculum. It is also consistent with Michael Apple’s ideas about “hidden curriculum.” Apple (1979) believes that in every school and classroom there is a basic set of unstated and unexamined assumptions about right and wrong, what and who is valued, and the way people should be related. Usually the hidden curriculum pits students into competition for limited teacher attention and scarce academic awards. Noddings wants the hidden or underlying curriculum brought out into the open and changed. Education would be based on caring human relationships, not on formality and rules that act as barriers between people.

The importance of caring relationships for improving education is a cornerstone of the movement to create smaller, less depersonalized secondary schools. In *Chartering Urban School Reform* (1994), Michelle Fine discusses efforts “to dismantle the urban high school as we know it—large, anonymous, and filled with more cracks than safety nets—and to nourish, in its place, many small, intellectually intimate communities of learners” (p. 2). The most important aspect of this approach to education is that it ends student anonymity

and combats alienation by fostering relationship and community. Smaller schools and the process of community classroom building are discussed more fully in [chapters 5 and 6](#).

In my experience, some teachers develop caring relationships with students even in large, traditional secondary schools. We all know teachers who put in extra time working with teams and clubs, where they develop very close and supportive relationships with their students. Judy Logan, whom we met in [Chapter 2](#), writes about sharing “stealing stories” in her class without making moral judgments about each other. Presenting their stories of wrongdoing to people who care about them allows Logan's students to expose their vulnerability to each other, learn from their errors, and retain their humanity. Herbert Kohl (1994), who wrote about “creative maladjustment,” also discusses the idea of “willful not learning.” Kohl believes that many students decide not to learn the standard school curriculum as an act of defiance against arbitrary rules and unfair actions by teachers. He argues that the key to reaching students who are “willfully not learning” is developing mutual relationships of caring and trust. He agrees with Noddings that teachers must “walk the walk.”

How important are relationships between a teacher and his or her students? Adeola Tella, who at the time was a second-year teacher working in a troubled inner-city middle school (it was placed on a state list for reorganization), required students in her classes who misbehaved or failed to complete assignments to attend lunch detention. After a while her room was packed with students doing detention. Adeola realized that the students wanted to be with her and were competing to be “kept in.” She decided to build on her relationship with her students and make detention a reward rather than a punishment.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—A TEACHER WHO CARED ABOUT ME

When I was in middle school I joined the school's math team, even though I was not particularly interested in math. The reason was my official teacher, Brenda Berkowitz. My friends and I joined the math team because we liked the way she treated us and we wanted the relationship with her.

Questions to Consider:

1. As a student, did you ever have a special relationship with a teacher who inspired you to do well in school? Explain.
2. In your opinion, how important are relationships between a teacher and her or his students? Explain.

Section B: My Best Teachers: Learning from My Students

In [Chapter 2](#) I described Camp Hurley, a summer sleep-away camp in the Catskill Mountains of New York State. The children and teenagers who attended the camp were primarily from inner-city neighborhoods and between the ages of 6 and 17. Most were African American, but there were significant European American and Latino minorities.

The camp's philosophy stressed the richness of difference and the ability of people from diverse backgrounds to work together for common goals. The campers worked together on construction projects and dramatic presentations. They participated in sports, dance, and hiking. But the most important aspect of the camp's curriculum was reflecting on the conflicts that arose among people during the day-to-day experience of living at Camp Hurley.

I worked summers at this camp between the ages of 19 and 24 and I continued to volunteer on weekends and vacations into my thirties. As I mention in [Chapter 2](#), it is here that I learned how to teach. Most of my best teachers at Camp Hurley were the children. In this section I want to share some of my most powerful learning experiences, as children and teenagers struggled to help me understand what it means to be a teacher.

Lesson 1. It is possible to develop a diverse community based on mutual respect. At the beginning of the summer of 1973, I worked with the preteen group, boys and girls ages 12, 13, and 14. In early July, we went on a 20-mile, three-day hike along Rondout Creek to the point where it flows into the Hudson River; to the best of my memory, about 16 campers and three staff members made the trip. One of the campers, a young girl I will call Joan, had cerebral palsy. She walked with difficulty and it was often hard for the other children to understand her when she spoke. She was also one of the few European American children in this group. Before the hike, the group decided that Joan would walk in front and set the pace for the others. It also discussed why she would not be able to carry a backpack. It was a difficult hike and at one point we walked most of the night in a downpour. At first there was some grumbling that Joan was not carrying anything. But as we hiked on, complaints about fairness turned into admiration for the doggedness and courage of this young woman who led by example. By the end of the hike, the staff and campers were helping each other as we sang, talked, and played. On this hike I learned what young people are capable of if they are respected, given a chance to work out their conflicts, and allowed to show their best side.

Lesson 2. It is not what you say, but how students experience what they hear. Later that summer, I learned a very painful lesson from the preteen boys groups. The youngsters were all African American. We were preparing a dramatic presentation on slavery and I explained that some Southerners used the Bible to defend the enslavement of Black people. They thought I believed these proslavery views and they were furious with me; it took weeks to reestablish a relationship of trust. I learned that a teacher has to be concerned with who students are and how they feel. As a teacher, it is not what you say, but how students experience what they hear.

Lesson 3. When people work together they can achieve their goals. During the final three weeks of 1973, I was working with the 10-year-old boys group and we were having a very good time together. The summer was ending with a Medieval Guild Fair and my group was making ceramic chess pieces and a wooden board and performing at the fair as tumblers. The only problem was that the boys wanted to go on an overnight hike and the program director felt the schedule was too crowded to permit it. At the last Friday evening staff meeting of the season, we heard shouting and the sound of general mayhem coming from my cabin. The program director and I went up to investigate, but as we approached the lights went out and everything quieted down. Nevertheless we rushed into the cabin, flicked on the light, and the program director, determined to punish the malefactors, shouted: "This group is going on a night hike." Simultaneously, nine 10-year-old boys leaped out of bed fully dressed and ready to go.

Lesson 4. Building a relationship requires time, patience, and trust. During the summer of 1974, my nine-year-old boys group was put in charge of repairing a roadside drainage ditch. It was an important task: Unless the drains were repaired, the edges of the dirt road washed away during rainstorms. Some of the boys were not enthusiastic about the assignment. I spent two days trying to get the campers interested in the job and one boy was particularly resistant. The group could not persuade him to work and I could not make him. His holdout was beginning to threaten the entire project so the group met and decided that only people who wanted to learn how to repair the ditch were allowed to help. The only condition was that people who decided not to work had to remain within sight of the group. At first, two other boys joined him and they meandered a short way off into the woods. However, the second day they decided to join the rest of

the group. The third day, the program director came by while eight of the nine-year-old boys were working hard clearing the drains of leaves, roots, and rocks; mixing cement; and lining the ditch with slate slabs. He asked if I knew that one of the boys was in the woods. When I said that I did, he wanted to know why I had not gone after him. I explained that the boy did not want to work on the project and I had left the decision up to him. The program director was a little skeptical about what would happen, but the next day the boy decided to join us. A couple of days later, I was working with the camp newspaper committee and a substitute counselor was with my group. Suddenly we were hit with the first big rain of the season. About 15 minutes into the storm, the counselor came to get me. The entire group ran away and he had no idea where they were. I started to laugh and we set off to find them. We located them on the road at the spot where we were fixing the drain. The boys wanted to see how their work was holding up. When the counselor decided not to let them go because it was raining, they decided to go without him. After all, it was their work.

Lesson 5. Learn to laugh at yourself. In my first year at camp, I had an 11-year-old group of boys. One of the campers had been abused as a child and was living in a group foster home. To ingratiate himself with the other children, he would imitate the camp staff, principally me. I was new on the job, stressed out, and the imitations drove me crazy. I thought he was out to humiliate me in front of the other campers and I could not take it. I started screaming at the group and lost control of myself and of them. It was a horrible three weeks. Three years later I was assigned to work with the 14-year-old boys, including this same young man. He immediately started doing imitations of me. Some of the other campers knew him and me from previous years and they wondered what would happen. Before the tension could mount, I laughed, gave him a high five and said something like, “Man, you are good. You do me better than I do.” Then we gave each other a hello hug and the group began to discuss all the things we wanted to do that summer.

Lesson 6. Use the “think” method. Playing softball with eight- to ten-year-olds can be an annoying experience. Most of the children find the sport too difficult. They get frustrated, the games become long and boring, the field is hot and dry, and tempers are short. Finally, I borrowed ideas from two popular movies, *The Karate Kid* (1984) and *The Music Man* (1962), to teach campers how to play. In *The Karate Kid*, the martial arts master has his young apprentice paint a fence and wax a car using precise, repetitive motions. Once the apprentice can duplicate the motions, he is ready to practice karate. In *The Music Man*, a con artist convinces a town that its children can learn to play musical instruments by imagining that they are playing them (hence, the “think” method). I decided to break softball down into a few basic movements used for hitting, catching, and throwing the ball. Campers practiced the movements without any equipment, kind of like a baseball ballet. Then they would come to bat, without a bat, and learned to “see” the pitch instead of guessing at its location and lunging at it. After a few days of the think method, they were able to play softball.

Lesson 7. Ask them. Many of the younger children were homesick and a little scared, especially at night. At “lights out,” I walked from bed to bed tucking in some of the children and just saying “good night” to others. One of the counselors asked me how I decided which children got tucked in and who got a simple “good night.” I reflected for a few seconds and responded, “I ask them.”

Lesson 8. Given an opportunity, young people do amazing things. In 1971, the entire camp held a one-day “conference of struggle.” Each group of campers did a presentation on ways that different groups of people struggled for freedom. Some of the presentations were in the form of dance or drama. Other groups led songs or created artistic displays. At the end of the conference, everyone (from children age six to adults in their fifties) participated in a discussion on the meaning of freedom. Given an opportunity, young people do amazing things.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—LEARNING FROM STUDENTS

Question to Consider:

Many of you have worked as counselors, tutors, or classroom assistants. What have you learned from your students? How will these lessons help you be a better teacher?

Section C: How Important Is It to “See” and “Hear” Students?

Patricia Carini and the Prospect Center (Himley, with Carini, 2000) developed an approach to teaching that includes a “descriptive review” of students. It involves teams of teachers in careful observation of children and a “disciplined” review of their ideas and work. The purposes of the process are “to make the child more visible by coming to understand him or her more fully and completely as a particular thinker and learner” and to develop in teachers “the habits of mind—the stance—of careful observation and description” (p. 127). Close and disciplined observation and review allows teachers to relate to children as human beings with a world of potential, rather than as problems to be solved. Teachers discover student academic and character strengths, see the connections students make between ideas, and learn how they make meaning of their world. The process supports the caring environment described by Noddings and makes it possible for teachers to scaffold on the strengths of individual students as they plan instruction.

Another advantage of careful observation of students by teams of teachers is that it helps us examine exactly what we are doing. Teachers are human, and I know I have made quick and unfair judgments about students and classes. When you talk issues over with other teachers, you get to see a different side of students and events. I have also reviewed videotapes of my own teaching and the work of other teachers, and discovered that what we thought had happened in the class was quite different from what had taken place. The research team of Sadker and Sadker (1994) has prepared videotapes of exemplary teachers, who unconsciously were providing more attention to the boys in their classes than to the girls. After reviewing the tapes, the teachers were able to change the way they related to students.

Relationship is fundamental to instruction. Maxine Greene, a major twentieth-century American educational philosopher, argues that to create democratic classrooms, teachers must learn to listen to student voices. Listening allows teachers to discover what students are thinking, what concerns them, and what has meaning to them. When teachers learn to listen, it is possible for teachers and students to collectively search for metaphors that make knowledge of the world accessible to us.

Attention to individual students takes time, but if Noddings, Greene, and Carini are correct, it is fundamental to transforming schools and classrooms and reaching all children. I think it is significant that when a child has recognized special needs, this kind of personal attention to the way they learn is mandated by law. Teachers, counselors, and psychologists develop an individualized education program (IEP) for each student, which is reevaluated on a regular basis.

Close attention to the needs and learning styles of individual students is also a goal in middle schools, where teachers are organized as interdisciplinary teams who have the same classes, rather than into academic departments. In these schools, teachers and counselors meet daily and engage in an ongoing review of individual student progress. This helps team members to better know individual students and allows them to intervene before a minor upset grows into a major problem.

Mentoring is another way to foster relationships between teachers and students. A number of high schools are experimenting with student-created interdisciplinary portfolios or projects that are periodically examined by teams of teachers. These reviews provide the opportunity for teachers and students to get to know each other and for teachers to offer academic support and guidance. Portfolio assessment is discussed in greater

depth in [Chapter 8](#).

In order to learn about her students, Susan Soitiriades Poulis, whom we met in [Chapter 2](#), has them write personal essays about themselves and their backgrounds that are shared in class. Another way to learn about students is to ask them to complete a voluntary “student profile.” A sample format is online (SM9).

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—ONE SIZE FITS FEW

Susan Ohanian is a leading critic of national standards and standardized tests. In her book, *One Size Fits Few* (1999), Ohanian argues in favor of personalizing instruction and individualizing assessment as the best way to meet the needs of students and to really understand what they have learned.

Questions to Consider:

1. In your view, what are the advantages and disadvantages of careful observation of students and a “disciplined” review of the ideas and work of individual children?
2. Do you think asking students to complete a student profile would help you as a teacher? Explain.
3. If you were designing your own student profile, what questions would you ask? Why?
4. Where do you stand on the debate over national standards and testing versus personalizing instruction and individualizing assessment? Explain your views.

Section D: What Does It Mean to Be “Gifted”?

Online there are three essays that examine the school experiences of different sets of students. The first essay discusses “gifted” programs and their impact on students who are placed in these classes (E5). The second essay is based on my *Huffington Post* columns and examines admissions procedures for specialized schools for supposedly gifted students (E6). The third essay is about a special project involving students in a remedial reading program (E7).

I suspect that most teachers, and most people who are reading this book, would prefer to work with students labeled “gifted.” We see them as an easier and more interesting group to relate with and teach. These are the students who most frequently have special relationships with teachers. They assist in offices, are members of school clubs, and produce the yearbook and the play. This group of students generally feels comfortable with teachers; they probably had positive experiences earlier in their school careers and know teachers from their families or communities. But being placed in the “gifted” class carries a burden, which the essay explores.

The second group includes students that most teachers try to avoid because they can be difficult to handle. They often have serious academic and social problems and are resistant to the goals of school. I think this essay shows how important positive relationships with teachers and other adults are for these students.

Most new students in teacher education programs (and unfortunately many teachers as well) tend to *universalize* from their own experience as secondary school students. They believe there is only one right way to learn, one right way to act, and that is the way that they *think they did* in school (I italicized *think they did* because I am not convinced that it really happened that way).

As I mentioned earlier, Lisa Delpit has challenged this approach to teaching because when teachers act based on their own class and cultural assumptions, they fail to see the strengths and the needs of their students and are unable to relate to them. The idea that teachers should respond to individual differences in the ways that students learn is also a crucial component of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1987; 1993). Gardner disputed the ideas that human intelligence can be accurately summarized with one reference point, and that all people learn in essentially the same fashion. He suggests nine types of intelligence possessed by students in a variety of combinations: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, body-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal (social), intrapersonal (reflective), naturalistic (characterized by interest in the natural environment), and ritualistic (exhibited through a deep understanding of connectedness and ritual). Gardner (1987) argues that curricula and teachers must “recognize and nurture all of the varied human intelligences, and all of the combinations of intelligences,” so that schools and societies are able to appropriately address “the many problems that we face in the world.” While I think that Gardner fractures intelligence into too many distinct pieces, his basic idea is very valuable. If teachers accept that students have cultural and conceptual differences, it will not only improve instruction, but also bonds of relationship.

As you read the essays, I hope you reconsider some of your assumptions about how schools should be organized, whom you would prefer to work with, and the impact of this kind of grouping on students. I wrote a version of the first essay for a local newspaper. The second essay was written with one of my research partners, Judith Y. Singer, who is also my wife. Judi was formerly the director of the day care center discussed

in the essay. A version of this article appeared in the magazine *Multicultural Perspectives* (Singer, J., 2000).

JOIN THE CONVERSATION–WERE YOU GIFTED?

Questions to Consider:

Before reading the essays, please answer the following questions.

1. What was your experience with “gifted” or advanced placement programs as a student?
2. Should students with higher test scores be segregated from the rest of the student body? Explain.
3. In your opinion, what does it mean to be “gifted”?

After you have read the essays, please answer the following questions.

1. Do the benefits of “gifted” programs outweigh the problems they create?
2. Should programs like this be reserved for the “gifted” class? Explain.
3. In your opinion, were the children at I.S. 292 “gifted”? Explain.
4. What steps would a teacher need to take to create a project like the one implemented with the students from I.S. 292?

Section E: Should Teachers See Race and Discuss Injustice?

In 1963, James Baldwin (1998), a well-known African American author, wrote a powerful essay that he directed toward teachers. After acknowledging that he was not a teacher, Baldwin asked his audience to hear out his ideas about the problems confronting schools, teachers, and students. Baldwin argued:

The whole process of education occurs within a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society. Thus for example, the boys and girls who were born during the era of the Third Reich, when educated to the purposes of the Third Reich, became barbarians. The paradox of education is precisely this—that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. (pp. 678–679)

According to Baldwin, “The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change” (p. 679). He believed he was speaking in a dangerous time and he was especially concerned with teachers who were working with African American youth. He said that if he were a teacher working with this group of students:

I would try to teach them—I would try to make them know—that those streets, those houses, those dangers, those agonies, by which they are surrounded, are criminal. I would try to make each child know that these things are the results of a criminal conspiracy to destroy him. I would teach him that if he intends to get to be a man, he must at once decide that he is stronger than this conspiracy and that he must never make his peace with it.... I would teach him that there are currently very few standards in this country which are worth a man's respect. That it is up to him to begin to change these standards for the sake of the life and health of the country. (p. 685)

Baldwin concluded: “One of the paradoxes of education was that precisely at the point when you begin to develop a conscience, you must find yourself at war with your society. It is your responsibility to change society if you think of yourself as an educated person” (p. 685). He adds, “If this country does not find a way to use that energy, it will be destroyed by that energy” (p. 686).

Each time I reread this essay, I am struck by its currency, yet I know it was written over 50 years ago. I think we have to ask ourselves why it still rings so true, and how we respond to it as teachers and prospective teachers. Should we dismiss Baldwin as an echo of another era or as a prophet whose message is only intended for people planning to teach in “the city” or “the ghetto”? If we teach in those inner-city urban schools, do we expose ourselves to criticism by colleagues, administrators, and politicians by inviting students to stand up against injustice and demand “standards” that are “worth a man's respect”? Can we do this knowing that when students learn to challenge unfair practices, they will also be questioning our attitudes and behavior in class?

If we are working in suburban schools, do we have a responsibility to teach about race and upset the comforting myths held by many White students, parents, and colleagues? Or, do we allow them to continue to live with blinders on, culturally challenged, in the middle of a world of diversity and oppression beyond their wildest imaginations?

Should privileged students learn that their bounty comes at the expense and suffering of others, or is it safer to just let them compartmentalize, stereotype, and believe that I have what I have because my family, my ancestors, my people, and so on worked hard, while “they” are poor, sick, without because of some flaw in their individual or group character and culture?

JOIN THE CONVERSATION–RACE AND INJUSTICE

Question to Consider:

1. Should teachers see race and discuss injustice? Explain.

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Suggestions for Further Reading

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On Classroom Organization:

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5

ORGANIZATION: HOW ARE CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOLS ORGANIZED?

Teacher education students and beginning teachers rarely think about the different ways that schools are organized. For most, their own experience as a secondary school student is the primary model they are familiar with and what they assume is the norm. But there are a number of things you need to consider as you try to figure out the type of teacher you want to be and where you would prefer to work. I emphasize prefer, because as a new teacher you may not have much of a choice.

For most of my career, I was a nontraditional teacher working within a traditional school setting. I needed to find a way to fit in and hold a job, but also to establish space where I was comfortable with my ability to relate with and influence students. As I grew older (and hopefully wiser), I realized there were some things I could change and other things or people I would have to accept (at least temporarily) and work with, through, or around. As a new teacher you will be able to make some choices about how you want to organize your classroom, but generally you must comply with the way a school is organized or leave. In my experience, as you establish competence and your ability to work successfully with students, you will be allowed greater freedom in decision making, but the bottom line is that schools are not organized for the benefit of teachers or to help a young and idealistic social activist achieve his or her personal vision for education. You may be the world's best teacher; however, if you cannot hold a job, you will not change anyone.

I know that at this point in your “career” it is difficult to imagine, but there are schools where you may not be willing to work. Twice I said “No, thank you” to positions. While I was still searching for a permanent appointment, I was offered a job at a middle school where the principal prided himself on centralized control over everything that took place in “his” building. This extended to dictating to teachers what they taught and what their students read and wrote every lesson. With the arrogance of youth, I explained I did not think it was a good system and left the interview. On another occasion, I was offered a transfer to a newly established elite academic high school that wanted me to set up a Westinghouse (now Intel) social science research program for its top students. I disagreed with their desire to make individual research by a select few the school's educational priority and declined the offer.

Although this chapter starts with the way schools are organized, its primary focus is on classrooms. I prefer the term organization to either management or control because, in the end, I think the only one you can control is yourself. Other people, especially adolescents, must be convinced that what you are saying and doing makes sense and they should go along. To paraphrase a quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln, you can control all of the students some of the time, some of the students all of the time, but you cannot control all of the

students all of the time. The effort to control everyone either promotes rebellion or teaches students to accept dictatorship. I do not think either of these ends is a worthy goal.

My experience is that a combination of respectful relationships with students and effective organization eliminates 90% of the classroom problems new teachers anticipate and fear. This allows you to concentrate on your primary task, which is teaching students. As a teacher, you must learn how to structure lessons and set up a classroom to minimize conflicts and encourage student participation. But effective classroom organization is difficult, especially for young and inexperienced teachers. I find that this is an area in which people who have had other work experience usually have a decided advantage. As you start your career, experienced teachers, including myself, will give you a lot of conflicting suggestions about how to be successful as a teacher. Take all advice “with a grain of salt,” and see what makes sense to you.

The rest of this chapter examines ways that high schools and middle schools are organized, including the tracking of students. I offer suggestions on how to adapt enough to find and hold onto a job in a traditional school setting, tips for organizing a classroom and developing class rules, and approaches to inclusive teaching. The chapter concludes with essays by teachers. Laura Pearson Wenger talks about the first day of the school year and Nichole Williams Allen discusses her experience adjusting to life in a traditional school. Online, Ken Dwyer compares being a student in a rural school with his experience teaching urban children and adults in rural Africa and in an affluent suburban community, and Kate Simons Smith describes teaching in public and parochial schools in different areas of the United States (C5).

Section A: If You Could Build a Secondary School from Scratch, What Would It Look Like?

In October 2000, a highly regarded magazine for teachers and school administrators, *Educational Leadership*, selected Raymond Callahan's 1962 classic *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* as one of the 100 most influential books on education written during the twentieth century. Callahan studied the period between 1900 and 1940, when the modern American school system emerged. It is an era when the goals and practices of industry were widely celebrated, so it is not surprising that business and industrial management philosophies shaped the development of public schools. The assembly line was the model; economy, the ideal; efficiency, the goal (see online SM10).

Two other powerful forces shaping the American secondary school at the same time were Christian religious beliefs and opposition to immigration. Between 1880 and 1924, more than 26 million immigrants, predominantly from eastern and southern Europe and either Roman Catholic or Jewish, arrived in the United States. This new population changed the face of the country and threatened to transform its culture and politics. The response of traditional elites, industrialists, established ethnic groups, and political and religious leaders was forced assimilation. New laws prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages and virtually barred new immigration between 1924 and 1965. Political radicals were arrested and deported, and schools were specifically designed to control, process, assimilate, and sort the new Americans and prepare them for manual labor and factory work. Progressive education, education for understanding and leadership, was reserved for the economic, social, and academic elite. Leonard Covello (with D'Agostino, 1958), an Italian immigrant who later became a high school principal, wrote in his memoir how workingclass and immigrant youth who could not fit into this system dropped out of school and entered the workforce at the lowest end of the wage and skill scale.

In the second half of the twentieth century, this system received a series of shocks that forced it to adapt, but not to fundamentally change. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, especially the Soviet's launching of a Sputnik satellite in 1957, increased the urgency for upgrading technical and scientific education and extending it to a larger number of students. As a result of the African American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and the post-World War II women's rights movement, entire groups of people were no longer systematically relegated to second-class status and denied the right to a quality education. Technological change and the deindustrialization of the United States since the 1960s has meant an end to many factory jobs and pressure to keep students in school longer.

However, despite the powerful socioeconomic forces at work in the past 50 years, most secondary schools in the United States continue to be organized on the old-fashioned business-industrial model. They have a rigid hierarchical chain of command, administrators are middle managers who enforce directives rather than team leaders who model successful teaching, teachers are required to achieve clearly operationalized and discrete outputs, and students are continuously tested to maintain quality control. Those who fail to meet standards are discarded.

Because of legal concerns, tracking has become more subtle, but it continues. The wealthiest families send their children to elite and expensive private schools. Affluent suburban districts provide a level of services that parents, students, and teachers in other areas can barely imagine. Cities offer the select few special magnet

programs. The more academically able of those who do not qualify frequently end up in parochial schools. The vast majority of inner-city youth and a large proportion of students in rural areas are still controlled, processed, assimilated, and sorted.

I visited a large urban high school that reminded me of the movie *Demolition Man* (1993), starring Sylvester Stallone, Sandra Bullock, and Wesley Snipes. It was two schools in one: One school was clean, shiny, and above ground; the other was seething with activity, received little in the way of resources, and was hidden away. At a meeting, the principal of these “schools” told a group of teacher education students about the approximately 200 students in the Scholar's Institute, the college scholarships they have earned, their advanced placement courses, and the number of awards the school has received because of this program. He distributed issues of the school's newspaper that recorded every one of their achievements. Yet the school had an official population of more than 2,500 students. Outside the window of his office we could see hundreds of students lined up, late for school, waiting to pass through metal detectors and be patted down by security guards. None of them was in the newspaper, and the principal spoke as if they did not even exist.

There are some hopeful signs that these situations will change in the future, especially if teachers and their representatives have more of a say in school organization.

- An important force for changing the way schools are organized was legal campaigns waged in state courts to require equalized school funding. In 1990, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that the funding of public schools primarily through local property taxes had produced a system in which “the poorer the district and the greater its need, the less the money available, and the worse the education.” Eventually, more than half of the states were involved in cases dealing with the financing of education and 11 were reviewing the use of local property taxes as the major source of revenue for public education. Campaigns such as these have the potential to ensure that schools in poorer communities, especially urban and rural areas, have significantly more money available for education.
- School-based management offers real possibilities for reforming the way schools operate. This approach to running schools usually involves teams of administrators, teachers, parents, and sometimes student and community participants in collective decision making about issues as diverse as spending on supplies, curriculum, school lunches, discipline codes, and construction priorities. This approach has been tried in many communities and has received strong support from teacher unions.
- What has come to be called the middle school model is organized so that interdisciplinary teams of subject teachers who have the same classes meet on a daily basis with counselors, inclusion teachers, classroom aides, and administrators to plan instruction, coordinate projects and trips, and review the progress of individual students. Not only does this approach improve instruction, but it builds morale among staff members and tears down some of the barriers that exist between teachers and administrators.
- Many large buildings housing thousands of high school students and hundreds of teachers have been subdivided into mini-schools of a few hundred students. This reform is similar to some of the innovations of the middle school movement. It is designed to combat youthful alienation and anonymity. Mini-schools provide a family atmosphere in which small groups of teachers know students on a personal level. They also allow for closer cooperation between teachers and site administrators. I

have included a chart for comparing different types of schools in the supplemental material section online (SM10).

- No Child Left Behind, the key educational policy of the George W. Bush administration, and Race to the Top, the program initiated by Barack Obama have been widely criticized, including by me, for making unrealistic demands on schools, teachers, and students without providing necessary financial support. But they have succeeded in focusing attention on student populations that were overlooked in aggregate reports on school performance. In an online essays (E19 and E20) I discuss my view of these “reforms” in greater depth.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—POTENTIAL FOR SCHOOL REFORM

Question to Consider:

1. Look at the online essays on charter schools (E8) and the Gates Foundation (E9). What are your views on past and present school reform proposals?

Section B: How Can You Find (and Hold Onto) a Job in a Traditional School Setting?

If you need to show off your great tattoos, insist on orange highlights in your hair, and just “can't go out” without your metal body piercings, I do not know if I can help you. But if you are willing to tone down a bit so you can find and hold onto a job in a traditional school setting, I have some tips that might not stretch your integrity too far.

I am a product of the 1960s, which is a polite way of saying that my appearance is a bit disheveled and I am prone to fits of self-righteous indignation. I have a 5 o'clock shadow by 10 in the morning on days I do shave, my shirt is never tucked into my pants, I do not own a hair brush, and I like comfortable shoes. Stylish, I am not; professional looking, just barely.

I am starting with appearance because I think it is symbolic of your willingness to compromise in order to fit in and to discover flexibility in what can appear to be a rigid school system. The way you deal with appearance gives some clue to how successful you can be navigating a school.

School administrators tend to wear formal clothing: suits and ties for men, professional suits for women, and leather shoes. However, in most schools, teachers are not expected to dress this way. I certainly did not. On the other hand, I think it is a sign of respect to students to dress appropriately. I do not wear jeans, sneakers, or T-shirts to class. “Proper” dress helps establish that school is a serious place where we are all expected to work hard and act in a responsible way.

I learned early in life that I hate ironing. I wear no-iron shirts and add a tie to cover any remaining wrinkles. A discreet tie is also important because it shows you are willing to try to fit in. Some of my ties are geared to lessons—a “Unicorn Tapestry” tie for studying about the Middle Ages, an “Australopithecus” tie from the Smithsonian Museum for human evolution, and maps of different parts of the world. I did have a problem once when an administrator mistook a hammer and saw tie from a public television carpentry program for a hammer and sickle, a symbol for communism, so you need to be careful.

Dry cleaning can be expensive, so I try to keep my wardrobe simple. I limit my school clothes to shades of blue and brown so pretty much everything goes together. I wear “Dockers” and corduroy pants and in the winter a sleeveless vest. If your school still uses chalkboards stay away from wool because it is a magnet for chalk dust. Because I am on my feet all day, I prefer lightweight leather walking shoes. I am a big fan of the Eddie Bauer, L. L. Bean, and Land's End catalogs. The Land's End canvas briefcase is inexpensive, durable, stretches to hold everything, is easy to sort through, and always looks presentable. And remember, if you go to an interview and set off the metal detectors, you are wearing too much jewelry.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—RACHEL THOMPSON'S TIPS FOR WOMEN ON DRESSING FOR TEACHING AND TENURE

Rachel Thompson is a middle school teacher and a mentor teacher in the Hofstra New Teacher Network. You will meet her again in [Chapter 6](#). Rachel recommends a relatively conservative approach to clothing and accessories.—Alan Singer

Questions to Consider:

1. What do you think of her views on appropriate school dress? Why?
2. How are they similar or different from yours?

What should a young female teacher wear to ensure that students and staff see her as an intelligent and respectable adult? Before you use the excuse of your first teaching job to shop for an entirely new wardrobe, here are a few things to keep in mind. This is a job you want to keep. In order to pave your way, move up the ladder, and, hopefully, get tenure, you need to project a certain image to supervisors, colleagues, parents, and students. Believe it or not, when you were a student in high school, no one ever paid as much attention to what you wore as your students will pay to what you are wearing now.

I hope these tips prove useful for you. The best advice I can give is that you should be observant. What do the teachers and supervisors who you respect wear? Find yourself a mentor to guide you through the rough times. Or, think back to a teacher or professor from your past that you admired. Use her as a guide for your own actions. But, choose wisely— you don't want to follow someone down the tube.

1. How short is too short? If you look at yourself in the mirror and wonder if your skirt is too short or if the slit is too high, then it probably is. Ditto for V-neck tops.
2. If students are telling you how sexy you look, then you need to stop at the mall and buy different outfits. Remember, it is really hard to run around a classroom in high heels everyday, and those pants that sit low on your waist may be great for a night out, but what happens when you bend over to talk with a student or write on the board? Your job is to help students stay focused on the lesson, not on your outfit.
3. I worked at my school for two years before anyone found out that I have a tattoo. Was I embarrassed by my youthful decisions? No. I just realized that I came of age in a different time from many of my colleagues who view tattoos and other forms of body art as “irresponsible” and “reckless.” I wanted to make sure that I would be evaluated on my teaching, not my “cover.” The same goes for nose rings (yes, I had one too), belly button rings, and all the other piercings that are common today. Not everyone understands why you choose to decorate your body. In addition, children are impressionable. Some student might want to be just like you and run home and ask Mom for a butterfly tattoo on her ankle. This is not the phone call the district superintendent wants to receive. If you feel strongly about your right to self-expression, make sure you work in an environment in which it is accepted.
4. “Casual Friday” is for office workers who have to wear business suits every day of the week. As a teacher, you have a lot of “clothing” freedom every day. However, jeans and sneakers do not a pedagogue make! Denim skirts and tops can also be questionable. Check with co-workers whom you respect and who are well regarded at the school. They are always the best source of information at a new place of employment.
5. Dressing professionally and neatly is a lot more important than dressing expensively. I have seen teachers of all shapes, sizes, styles, and ages mesmerize their students. The common factor is not how trendy or stylish they are, but rather how professional and respectful they are. Look at yourself in the mirror before you go to work and ask yourself, “Is the way I am dressed going to command respect?” Remember, dress does influence behavior. If you dress like you deserve respect, then you will act respectfully, you will treat others with respect, and you will get respect.

Dealing with my streak of self-righteous indignation has been a little more difficult. Lois Weiner, a former New York City high school teacher and author of *Urban Teaching, The Essentials* (2006), believes it is possible to maintain cordial relations with all colleagues, and suggests smoothing over potential conflicts. When someone says something about students that she finds offensive, she replies, “I know you don't believe that so you shouldn't say it” (p. 34). I respect Lois a lot, but I was never willing or able to follow her advice. Sometimes you must take a stand on an issue and cannot avoid making enemies. Everyone in the school will not be your friend. When colleagues openly and publicly talk about individuals or groups of students in ways

that I find unacceptable, I acknowledge their right to their opinion but challenge what they have to say and their right to say it in an unprofessional manner. If they continue, I inform them that I will not hesitate to report our conversation to appropriate supervisors. Over the years, many teachers have supported my response. They are upset when colleagues disparage or demean students and are glad when these teachers are confronted.

On the other hand, you will need allies if you want to affect the lives of students and even possibly help change schools. Over the years, I have found many colleagues, mentors, union officials, and school administrators whom I was privileged to work with. You were introduced to some of them in the [Chapter 3](#) section on “My Best Teachers.” Others have contributed to this book. I have concentrated my efforts as a teacher on building these relationships, though I have battled with my share of “dinosaurs” along the way. I have also learned a few valuable lessons that I would like to share.

1. When you do well with students, advocate for their rights and education, and are a positive force in the building, people who disagree with you will still respect you and you will earn the space you need to be the kind of teacher that you want to be. In the early 1980s, I tried to persuade my school principal to give us a Mac computer (advanced for that time) for the social studies magazine. He said there was none available, but that students could use the machine in his office whenever it was necessary. For a week, I scheduled students to be there every period of the day. On Friday, he gave us the computer to get them out of his office.
2. As an activist, I often made waves that unsettled school administrators. When students in my government class organized to go to Washington, D.C., to participate in a demonstration, the district office, fearing political opposition, questioned its educational validity. My department chair intervened and worked out a compromise that I accepted. An assistant principal joined us as a chaperone to ensure that the students were safe and that it was a legitimate learning experience. In this case, district officials were prepared to be flexible, but I had to be flexible as well.
3. If you champion every issue, people will soon either stop listening to you or resent it when you speak out. At school and department meetings, I try to be selective about my participation in discussion. I listen while others present their ideas, write down my thoughts, edit them, and only speak once or twice.
4. Teachers are swamped with paperwork and it is sometimes hard to tell which circular is important and which was issued so an administrator can claim everyone was notified (these are technically known in teaching as CYA notices, or “Cover Your Rear”). In general, attendance reports, grades, and anything else that directly affects students should get priority. For everything else I use the “third notice” rule. If a deadline is important, they will send you a third notice or contact you individually.
5. Teachers are fortunate to have union representation. Most of the time, your relationship with supervisors will be congenial, but not always. They often have outside pressures on them. If there is a point of contention, and you have a good working relationship with your supervisor, you can usually have an “off-the-record” conversation that will help clarify issues. But if an off the-record conversation is not possible and there is a union in the school, you should consult your

representative. What you are obsessing about is probably not such a big deal and has happened to many people in the past. If it is a real problem, the union representative will advise you how to proceed. In some circumstances, if it is allowed under the union contract or by law, your representative can be present at formal meetings with supervisory personnel.

6. Many senior teachers will recommend that you take a low profile until you get tenure, then you can “rock the boat” if you choose. In my experience, teachers who remain silent while untenured will continue to remain silent later, because administrators always have ways of rewarding the compliant and punishing opposition. Assignments to special programs, classes, clubs, or teams can be offered or withheld. As a new teacher you need to decide what kind of compromises you are prepared to make. Some school settings may be the wrong ones for you.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—“VALUABLE LESSONS”

Questions to Consider:

1. Earlier I warned you to take the advice of senior teachers with “a grain of salt.” However, in this section I offered six “valuable lessons” that I learned as a teacher. Which of the lessons do you agree with? Why?
2. In your opinion, does compromise mean selling out your values? Explain.

Section C: If You Could Design a Secondary School Classroom, What Would It Look Like?

In *Hard Times* (1854/1973), English novelist Charles Dickens introduces us to Thomas Gradgrind, an industrialist and the headmaster of a school where the goal is to take “little pitchers” and fill them “full of facts.” Gradgrind's school is in an English mill town during the Industrial Revolution of the mid-1800s and his students are destined to become cogs in the machinery of the new society. In the second chapter, titled “Murdering the Innocents,” he demonstrates his scientific method of teaching to a new instructor, Mr. M'Choakumchild:

“Girl number twenty,” said Mr. Gradgrind, squarely pointing with his square forefinger, “I don't know that girl. Who is that girl?”

“Sissy Jupe, sir,” explained number twenty, blushing, standing up, and curtsying.

“Sissy is not a name,” said Mr. Gradgrind. “Don't call yourself Sissy. Call yourself Cecilia.”

“It's father as calls me Sissy, sir,” returned the young girl in a trembling voice, and with another curtsy.

“Then he has no business to do it,” said Mr. Gradgrind. “Tell him he mustn't. Cecilia Jupe. Let me see. What is your father?”

“He belongs to the horse-riding, if you please, sir.”

Mr. Gradgrind frowned, and waved off the objectionable calling with his hand.

“We don't want to know anything about that, here. You mustn't tell us about that, here. Your father breaks horses, don't he?”

“If you please, sir, when they can get any to break, they do break horses in the ring, sir.”

“You mustn't tell us about the ring, here. Very well, then. Describe your father as a horse-breaker. He doctors sick horses, I dare say?”

“Oh yes, sir.”

“Very well, then. He is a veterinary surgeon, a farrier and horsebreaker. Give me your definition of a horse.”

(Sissy Jupe thrown into the greatest alarm by this demand.)

“Girl number twenty unable to define horse!” said Mr. Gradgrind, for the general behoof of all the little pitchers. “Girl number twenty possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals! Some boy's definition of a horse. Bitzer, yours.” (pp. 8–9)

Later in the chapter, we learn that Mr. M'Choakumchild, “and some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs. He had been put through an immense variety of paces, and had answered volumes of headbreaking questions.” Dickens wearily suggests that “if he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more!” (p. 12).

If this kind of classroom was a thing of past, it would be bad enough. Sadly, however, many of us have

witnessed, or experienced as students, schools in which teachers still use these approaches to teaching, where boredom and humiliation are wielded as weapons to keep students in line (see online SM11).

As a new teacher you have to decide on the kind of classroom you want to have, a decision that reflects your broader philosophy of teaching, standards established by your school or district, what your students are accustomed to from earlier experiences, what you have planned, and the materials you have to work with. Generally, I favor a flexible approach to organizing the classroom. I prefer moveable chairs with arms, but if I have to, I can adjust to tables and even fixed row seating. Even when I use cooperative learning with a class, I usually start every lesson with the room organized into rows. It makes it easier for me to perform clerical tasks (e.g., taking attendance, checking homework) and for students to get started with the lesson. From there, we switch the room around depending on what we are going to do that day. Students can work individually or with a partner in the next row, or four chairs can be made into a pinwheel that allows student cooperative learning teams to work together. If there is a student or teacher presentation, if we are watching a video, or if something needs to be copied off the board, we can keep the desks in rows. For a full-class discussion, in a large enough room, we “circle up.”

I decorate rooms with colorful subject-appropriate posters, student work, and plants. Once we had a class parakeet named Thomas Jefferson, whose cage was lined with photocopies of a picture of Jefferson's archenemy, Alexander Hamilton. When possible, I got free posters from airlines, video stores, book publishers, and at teacher conferences. When necessary, I bought them. I had to live in these rooms a large part of my day, so I wanted them to look and feel welcoming. One year, my room was so decrepit that I enlisted a group of students and we painted it. Steve Marlowe, a mentor teacher in the New Teachers Network, has a room full of hanging plants and plays music as students enter his class.

Other ideas for organizing the classroom to help achieve your educational goals (assuming you are not committed to the Gradgrind approach) and to convince students you know what you are doing include the following:

- Come in early in the morning and put greetings and instructions for each of your classes on the board. This makes it possible to greet students at the door at the start of the period. If you share a room with another teacher, you can arrange to use a sideboard and cover assignments with a roll-down map or a poster. If you are a “traveling man (or woman),” put notices on poster paper. Avoid using the projector at the start of a period before the class is set up. If you turn out the lights, you invite trouble.
- Seating arrangements are important. Most students like to have their own designated space. When you do not assign seats, there is sorting at the start of every period. Bullies grab the prime spots (e.g., in the back, next to a talkative, attractive, or flirtatious person). It is harder for you to learn student names and there is a general sense of disorder. On the first day of class I assign students to seats alphabetically and then we shift around a little so that a 6-foot 4, 250-pound football player is not squeezed into a chair in the front, blocking everyone behind him, and so that everyone can see and hear. I also inform students of three procedural rules. First, “I take attendance from the seat, so if the seat is empty, you are marked absent.” Second, “I do not like empty seats in the front. If you are absent a lot, I will move other people up.” Third, “There is no such thing as a permanent seat. If there are problems, someone

may have to move so we can all work more effectively. We will also change some seating assignments once we form cooperative learning teams.” Many new teachers seat “disruptive children” in front and middle of the classroom so they can “ride herd” on them. But if the student could be controlled in this simple fashion, neither the teacher nor the student would have the problem in the first place. This can also be counterproductive because it makes the student the center of attention. In my experience, students who are “wired” would rather not be that way and they certainly do not want to be embarrassed by teachers. I recommend letting a student that needs more space sit on the side of the room by the window so he or she does not feel so hemmed in.

- I used to live in terror that I would lose my record book. I wrote my name, classroom, department, home phone number, and home address on the inside cover. Then I discovered the spreadsheet. I am a “MacPerson” and use Microsoft Excel. I prepare a spreadsheet for each class and recruit a monitor to enter names, official classes, ID numbers, and phone numbers for each student. Columns are designated for attendance, homework, projects, and tests. I write on a printout for a week, update the data bank, reprint, and sleep better at nights. The program can even calculate student grades.
- Use your voice and posture to get attention, but once you have it, speak softer so they have to listen. If you habitually yell over the class, they will only get louder. Do not flick the lights on and off. It is demeaning to secondary school students and makes you look silly.
- My homework policy is very simple. You must do every assignment to pass the class. Homework is due on the date assigned, but late homework is always accepted. I believe every excuse, but students still must make up the work. I encourage students to do homework by putting questions from the homework on tests and by giving failing grades on report cards to students when they are missing work. Once students make up the work, I remove the homework penalty. I have been known to give incompletes (not enter a grade) or negotiate, but privately and only under extreme circumstances.
- Most new teachers collect, read, and grade too much student work. They become bookkeepers instead of teachers. Eventually they get swamped, frazzled, and burned out. They walk around the building with piles of loose-leaf scribbles and spend nights pushing paper instead of planning. Assignments are for the students so that they learn. I usually spot check homework while they are working individually or in groups and only collect what I actually want to read. Another helpful idea is pairing each student with a “writing buddy” who edits written work before it is submitted for evaluation.
- To free you up from clerical responsibilities and allow you to concentrate on teaching, have student monitors take attendance, check homework, and distribute books, supplies, and activity sheets.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—MODELS FOR ORGANIZING CLASSROOMS

Questions to Consider:

1. Which type of classroom would you have preferred as a student? Explain.
2. If you could organize your classroom your own way, what would it look like? Why?

Section D: Nuts and Bolts of Teaching: How Do You Establish Classroom Rules?

I smile on the first day of class. Why not? I like being a teacher and I like working with teenagers. I find you can be caring and still be efficient and demanding. When students know you are willing to smile, a disappointed or disapproving “teacher's look” carries much greater weight. If you always frown, it does not make a difference.

In January 2001, the New York State edition of a teachers' union newspaper reported that the winner of the Disney American Teacher of the Year Award winner had five “rules” and 50 “procedures” that students were obligated to follow in class. It seems to me that this was far too many procedures and substituted control for community. I prefer a more minimalist approach to rules that encourages student freedom and responsibility. However, I also recognize that some classrooms need greater structure than others. I would sometimes tell a more rambunctious group (the class at the end of the day or right after lunch), “I know how to teach the fun way and the boring way. I prefer the fun way, but by your response you will decide the way that I will teach this class.”

When I taught at schools that were relatively well organized and where students had an expectation of doing work and behaving in class, I had only two class rules. I introduced them with selections from songs performed by “Professor” Aretha Franklin: R-E-S-P-E-C-T and THINK. On the first day we discussed having a classroom where students and teachers respected each other and thought about the implications of our behavior on classroom community before we acted. We also discussed some procedures for resolving conflicts and my expectations for them.

In schools that tended to be disorganized and where procedures were less firmly established, I distributed “Singer's Ten Commandments” and we went over them on the first day. Some of the commandments were a restatement of school rules (no hats in class) and some were tailored for my class. However, even in this case, I tried to keep the classroom atmosphere relaxed. I did not post rules or require that students sign contracts where they promised on the pain of death to always be good. I always warned students, “If you sit with your head down I will figure the problem is that your wicked stepmother keeps you up all night chopping wood for the fireplace and scrubbing pots and pans. If it keeps happening, I will have to report her for child abuse, so don't give me the wrong message.”

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—SINGER'S TEN COMMANDMENTS

Question to Consider:

1. What do you think of my following recommendations on class rules? Why?

In my class, I stress the important connection between freedom and responsibility. The more responsibility students take in class, the more freedom they will have to learn. A few basic procedures will help the class run more smoothly.

1. Be a serious student. Respect yourself and others. Raise your hand before speaking and listen to your classmates. Let's learn from each other.
2. Come to class on time. Sit with your assigned team.
3. When you enter the room, copy the AIM, the DO NOW, and the HOMEWORK.
4. If you have to go to the bathroom, go to the bathroom. Take the pass from the front of the room. Unfortunately, only one person can go at a time. Don't leave for the first 10 minutes or the last 10 minutes of the period because you won't know how the lesson began or ended.
5. Please don't eat in class, play a radio, or sit with your head down. Please remove hats in class.
6. If you have been absent, bring a note. Cutters will be penalized. I take cutting as a personal insult.
7. Be prepared with a pen and notebook every day.
8. Class participation, homework, and preparation are all part of your grade.
9. Number all homework assignments. Keep them in a separate section of your notebook.
10. Homework is due when assigned but can be made up late. You must complete all homework assignments to pass the class. Answer all questions in complete sentences.

There are many ways to present rules in class. Henry Dircks, a social studies teacher in the New Teachers Network, has three posters hanging in his room. Each poster includes a picture of a former U.S. president and a slightly modified “quote.” Franklin D. Roosevelt says: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself; ... that and being late to class.” Thomas Jefferson explains: “All men are created equal, ... but people who participate in class get better grades.” Abraham Lincoln suggests: “With malice towards none; with charity for all ... let us strive to finish the work we are in ... and study hard for unit tests.”

Every society, community, and school has unofficial as well as official rules. These rules are not written down but definitely exist in practice. For example, what should your students call you? Most schools expect students to address teachers as Ms., Miss, Mrs., Mr., or Dr. So-and-So. But the rule is rarely written down anywhere. When I was young and just beginning, I needed to have students call me Mr. Singer to help me to establish myself as an adult and their teacher. On a couple of occasions I had students whom I knew from camp or the neighborhood, where they called me Alan. I told them that “outside I would always be Alan, but in class, they had to call me Mr. Singer.”

Eventually, when I became more comfortable with my role as a teacher, I changed the unwritten rule and introduced myself to new classes as Alan. The sun continued to shine, the Earth did not tremble, no administrator ever reprimanded me (though some teachers were unhappy), and I did not lose the respect of

my students. Members of the New Teachers Network who have tried this report similar results.

The advantage of unofficial rules, such as giving students incompletes, is that they are less likely to cause a problem with school authorities, and if they do, the situation can be “massaged.” Once I was called to the assistant principal’s office because I had too many missing grades on my grade sheets. I looked puzzled and said, “it must be a computer error.” Some of my unwritten class rules, which I convey to students orally, include the following:

- If you have trouble with another teacher or the dean, come see me before it escalates. As long as you are honest with me, I will help you as best as I can. But if you ever lie to me, I will not be able to trust and support you.
- Nobody in my class is allowed to fight in school. If anyone is picking on you or wants to fight with you, tell them they must fight me first. I am not worried because I know you and your friends are my “back.”
- If you want to tell me something, I cannot promise in advance to keep it a secret. You are telling me because you know I care about you and you trust my judgment that I would not intentionally hurt you.

In [Chapter 2](#), I introduced a guide for teachers developed by the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II. Although their students were generally adults, some were not much older than the teenagers in your classes and I suspect many were not enthusiastic about being either students or soldiers. The guide offers 14 suggestions to help teachers reduce discipline problems (see the following Join the Conversation box). Its basic premise is that “in a class of mature students who are kept busy in worthwhile activities which are of interest and value, there is little or no disciplinary difficulty. If students have a real motive for studying, if the class work gives them something useful and important, and if they are kept busy thinking or doing, problems of discipline will be rare indeed.” In general, I agree with its approach. What do you think? At the end of [Book II, Chapter 6](#), I have a series of case studies that will let you test out your own ideas on dealing with classroom and other professional problems.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—THE ARMY AIR CORPS MANUAL RECOMMENDATIONS ON CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE

1. Be the master of the situation from the start.
2. Begin each lesson promptly, vigorously, and interestingly.
3. Plan each lesson carefully so that there is enough to keep the entire class busy to the end of the period.
4. Don't worry about being too severe or strict during the first lesson. Your class will “size you up” quickly as a good disciplinarian, or as a weak one. It is easier to relax a tight rein than to get control again after the class has run away with you. This does not mean that you must be a martinet. Be fair and human even though you set high standards.
5. Deal promptly and effectively with the first infraction of discipline, however small. A class does not object to a strict instructor if he is fair and efficient.
6. Don't use a loud voice or threatening language.
7. Drive home the idea that your students and you are working together in a great cause, the preparation of our nation's defense.
8. Keep everyone busy, and there will be little opportunity for trouble.
9. Distribute your questions to all the members of the class and hold all accountable.
10. Follow no set order in asking questions. Keep all the class alert and attentive.
11. Stand while you teach so that you can see what is going on all the time, as well as being able to serve more efficiently as an instructor.
12. Make your teaching lively and interesting.
13. Don't make threats of punishment that you cannot or do not intend to carry out.
14. Make your students enjoy your class; let them learn that you know your job and that by working with you they can achieve much that will be of great value to them. Take a personal interest in them. Help them with their difficulties and problems, and you should have little or no trouble with discipline.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are your concerns about student discipline as you prepare to become a teacher? Why?
2. Do you agree or disagree with the philosophy that underlies this approach to classroom discipline?
3. Do you think an approach to discipline intended for “mature students” in the military is appropriate in a middle school or high school classroom? Explain.
4. What formal rules would you want in your classroom? Why?

Section E: How Do You Organize an Inclusive Classroom?

Increasingly, teachers are grappling with ways to adapt teaching strategies to inclusive classrooms containing students from different social and economic backgrounds and with different levels of preparation and interest, and including students who had previously been programmed for separate remedial or special education classes. Inclusive classes can be models for heterogeneous grouping and multicultural education.

Some of the students previously assigned to separate classes have physical difficulties whereas others are labeled learning disabled, ADHD (with an attention deficit and hyperactive), or emotionally disturbed. Many youths were classified as special needs students and placed in separate restricted classrooms because teachers and evaluators considered them unable to adjust to the discipline demanded of students in regular classroom settings. This is the group of children classroom teachers have the greatest reservations about reassigning to inclusive classrooms. Significantly, in many school districts, this group of students is disproportionately African American, male, and from lower income families.

Under law, every student assigned to special education programs has a specific defined “disability” or special need and an IEP intended to help him or her succeed in school. Many special education programs have unnecessarily isolated special needs students, contributing to stereotyping and high rates of academic failure. The issue should be how the educational and social needs of these students are best addressed.

An additional problem is what schools and teachers mean by disability and ability. We tend to think of these categories as universal, distinct, and unbiased. However, this model may be arbitrarily squeezing a wide spectrum of normal human activity into a narrow band deemed acceptable.

As a teacher, instead of discussing ability and disability, I prefer to talk about performance level. Performance level is temporary, not permanent, and more easily measurable. More important, teachers can develop strategies to help a range of students improve their performance levels. As you will discover as you read the following suggestions, I believe the same approaches for organizing inclusive classrooms are applicable in every classroom.

Some teachers are uncomfortable with the idea of inclusive classrooms because they often mean that more than one teacher will be in the room and planning instruction. It requires a level of teamwork that can be enticing in theory but difficult to implement in practice.

General Suggestions for Inclusive Classrooms

- **Structure**—Organize lessons and set up the classroom to minimize conflicts and distractions and to encourage student participation. All students need structure. In an inclusive classroom with a diverse student population, a clear structure becomes even more important.
- **Relationship**—Students who feel that their teachers care about them as human beings and are willing to respond to their needs and concerns will be more willing to cooperate, even if they do not understand, disagree with, or have difficulty following instructions. Students want you to be demanding but must believe you are caring and fair.
- **Classroom community**—As students develop a sense of relationship with each other and the teacher, an interest in the topics being explored, confidence that they will be treated fairly, and the conviction

that their ideas will be heard, they develop a commitment to the success of the class as a whole and all its members. As a group, they want to learn and they take responsibility for what goes on in their class. They develop the collective mentality that “we learn as a TEAM!” A sense of classroom community is essential if inclusive classrooms are going to be successful.

- Curriculum and instruction—In traditional, tracked classrooms, teachers aim curriculum and materials at a hypothetical class average. Sometimes difficult material is used to challenge the more advanced students, sometimes easier material is used to help everyone keep up, but the goal generally is to target the middle. A different model for inclusive classrooms is the use of differentiated texts and assignments. Everyone in class studies and discusses the same topics, but students work individually or in either homogenous or heterogeneous groups, using reading material adapted for their current performance level.
- Assessment—Tests should not be a contest for the highest grades. I use the same rule for all students. Everyone receives the time and the help they need to demonstrate what they have learned on exams. Students who need to can take tests in a resource room. This is discussed further in [Chapter 8](#).

Co-teaching Suggestions for Classroom and Inclusion Teachers

- Plan together. The classroom teacher, as content specialist, develops initial lessons. The inclusion teacher designs adapted materials.
- Work together. It is almost impossible to teach a full class lesson while someone else is moving around the room talking with individual students or collecting material. Necessary individualized teacher-student interactions have to be planned in advance.
- Teach the class together. Take turns teaching the full class or have the inclusion teacher step in during individual work and group activities.
- Have a study center in a quiet corner where the inclusion teacher can provide extra help during individual assignments. Every student in the class should have the right to use the study center. This will enhance classroom community.
- Inclusion teachers can take groups of students to the library or computer center to work on individual reports and study for tests. Again, every student in the class should have the right to use this resource.
- Do not put all the inclusion students in the same group. It undermines community and defeats the purpose of inclusion. Academically high-performing students will benefit from the opportunity to explain ideas to students who are performing at an academically lower level. We all learn from teaching.
- People are good at different things. Inclusion students may be group leaders and peer teachers on some projects.
- Sometimes teachers can organize groups that are able to function with minimal teacher involvement so both teachers can concentrate on helping the other groups.
- When students are in groups, the inclusion teacher (and the classroom teacher) should work with the entire group, not just the inclusion students.
- Individual students within groups can use material appropriate to their individual performance levels (differentiated texts) and contribute to team learning.

- Even in a team relationship, someone has to have ultimate responsibility for the class and make final decisions about policies, curriculum, and timing. Someone has to be in charge. I believe it should be the classroom teacher, who must teach a subject to the full class, rather than the inclusion teacher, whose primary responsibility is the performance of an individual student or a small group of students. Disagreements between teachers should be openly discussed in team meetings or, if necessary, mediated with supervisors.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

Questions to Consider:

1. Many school districts are moving toward an inclusion model for secondary schools. Do you believe these classes can be successful for all students?
2. Laura Pearson Wenger, a member of the New Teachers Network, has worked as an inclusion social studies teacher in a 7–12 school. Laura helped me with this section, but disagrees with my idea that one teacher must be in charge of the class. She feels they can be co-equals. What do you think? Why?

Section F: Becoming a Teacher: Responding to Different School Settings

In this section, you will meet four teachers who have worked in a range of different school settings. The question you need to consider is whether successful teaching differs significantly from community to community or has a fundamental universality. Laura Pearson Wenger is a middle school teacher in an affluent suburban school district. She remembers how much she loved school as a child and that is her starting point as a teacher. She recommends that teachers keep the classroom rules simple and concentrate on building an inclusive and caring community from “Day One.” Laura's classroom census form is online.

Nichole Williams Allen is now an assistant principal in a middle-class suburban school district with an increasingly minority population. Despite the problems she faced in her first year of teaching, she decided to earn an advanced certificate in school administration so that she can try to change her school from within. In this essay, she says, “I know some people think that I have an advantage being successful with my students because I am African American. I think it gives me a head start, I admit that. I have an edge because I can relate more to their lives.... But that is only the beginning.... If you are boring students to death, if you do not respect them, it does not make a difference if you are Black or White.”

Online, you will meet Ken Dwyer and Kate Simons Smith. Ken Dwyer grew up and attended school in a small, rural farm community. He has taught in urban settings, programs for “at-risk” youth, a rural African village, and an affluent suburban community. Ken believes that a teacher's ability to know students and earn their respect, no matter what the locality, is the universal key to successful teaching. I find his discussion of earning the respect of African masons through a sharing of expertise reminiscent of Paulo Freire's ideas, which were discussed in [Chapter 1](#). In a Freirean classroom, and Ken's, everyone has a recognized area of expertise that includes understanding and explaining their own life. Sharing this expertise is an essential element in the classroom curriculum.

Kathleen Simons Smith is a European American woman who grew up in a suburban community where she attended parochial schools. Both of her parents are were university-based teachers. Kate was an outstanding student who majored in mathematics in college. She decided to become a teacher while working as a house manager in a psychiatric treatment facility for teenagers. After teaching in a suburban minority community for three years, Kate and her husband relocated to another part of the United States, where she got a job teaching math in an all-girl Roman Catholic high school. In this essay, Kate discusses her goals as a teacher and compares her experiences in these schools.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—RESPONDING TO DIFFERENT SCHOOL SETTINGS

Questions to Consider:

1. Laura Pearson Wenger liked school and believes that most students also like school. Do you agree? Do you think this is related to who students are and their life experiences? Explain.
2. Laura has few class rules. She believes that “every situation is different” and that students should be “treated individually.” Do you agree? Explain.
3. Nichole Williams Allen believes that she has an advantage being successful with her students because she is African American, but she emphasizes that that is only the beginning. “If you are boring students to death, if you do not respect them, it does not make a difference if you are Black or white.” Do you agree or disagree with Nichole’s view? Explain.
4. Nichole offers three lessons she learned during her first year of teaching. Which lesson do you consider most important? Why?
5. Many of Ken Dwyer’s career decisions have been based on his desire to learn about difference in the world. Would you be willing to make similar choices? Explain.
6. Ken believes the qualities of successful teaching are universal? Do you agree? Explain.
7. Kate believes that while “the lives of the two groups of students outside of school may be different, in the classroom the issues they face as math students, especially problems related to motivation and anxiety, are largely the same.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
8. Because she was such a strong math student, Kate found that her greatest difficulty was “re-teaching myself topics as if I were learning them for the first time—which is what my students are doing.” Is this a potential problem in your subject area? Explain.
9. Knowing these teachers from their essays, if you were a parent, would you want them to teach your children? Why or why not?

The First Day of the School Year

by Laura Pearson Wenger

Teachers need to spend the first couple of weeks really getting to know students. For some of my students, it is not only the first day of the school year, but their first day in middle school. They are both excited and very nervous. It is important from “Day One” that they know I am happy to be there, organized, ready for action, and a caring individual who is interested in them. That means you have to “S-M-I-L-E.” On “Day One” I do the following:

- Greet each student at the door.
- Hand each child a course outline.
- Direct students toward pre-assigned seats organized either in alphabetical or reverse alphabetical order.
- Welcome students to class and introduce myself with a personal anecdote about who I am and why I teach.
- Explain clearly how to read and follow instructions written on the board. For example, each day when you enter the room you need to copy the date, aim question, and homework assignment and start the “Do Now” assignment.
- Review procedures for arriving in and leaving the classroom: no one packs up until I say “have a great day;” completing, collecting, and grading homework, projects, and tests; and our class “discipline plan.” Students are expected to be respectful of each other. Misbehavior is not tolerated. Every situation is different and students are treated individually.
- Send home a letter introducing myself and the course of study to parents.
- Ask the students to complete a class census.

Time permitting on “Day One” we also do the following:

- Make a “top five list” of their likes and dislikes about school (I type it up and hand it out the following day).
- Discuss what they will be learning about in class this year.
- Look at sample projects from previous years.
- Answer any questions students have about class, school, and life.

I find these are things most students want to know on the first day of school.

- Am I in the right room?
- Where am I supposed to sit?
- What will I be doing this year?
- How will I be graded?
- What are the rules in this classroom?
- Will the teacher treat me as a human being?
- Who is the teacher as a person?

A New Teacher's Difficult Journey

by Nichole Williams Allen

The first year of teaching is a mind-numbing experience. Schools of Education can give you all the academic training in the world, but they cannot prepare you for the barrage of paperwork, discipline issues, and the delicate politics involved in working with parents, administrators, and veteran colleagues. Added to this, I had the special situation of returning to live and work in the school district where I was raised.

When I started working in the district, I was excited for many reasons. There was a special feeling knowing that I could give something back to a community I had been a part of and which remained a major part of my life. I also looked forward to working with teachers who had encouraged me to join their profession.

Once the school year began, however, I was struck by some serious realizations. What I had studied about educational philosophy did not easily correlate with what I actually experienced in the classroom. The pedestal that I put my former teachers on turned out to be much too high. Finally, I had to find a way to redefine my relationship with my students. Although we related in a lot of ways, there were big social, political, economic, and academic holes in their lives that I had to address, even when they were unwilling to cooperate. Suddenly, somehow, I had to find a way to integrate into one cohesive mission my personal dreams about being a teacher and working with young people, all I had learned and had adapted into my educational philosophy, and the reality I was experiencing trying to get along with colleagues and motivate students. I discovered that my mission, to educate students to the best of my ability, in the most creative ways possible, so they could achieve to the best of their ability, is a profound joy for me, but also an overwhelming challenge.

I made the decision to teach in my old high school despite reservations because my experience there as a teenager was so important to me. I actually turned down a higher paying job in another district. The interview process was odd because the committee included my ninth-, tenth-, and twelfth-grade social studies teachers, and they remembered me because I had been very active in school programs as a student.

When I did a demonstration lesson, I knew a number of the students from the neighborhood and they kept calling me Nichole instead of Miss Williams and telling me they hoped I would become a teacher there. There was also tension because when I was offered the job, a young White woman, who was a substitute teacher at the school and who was also an alumna, was passed over. The rumor was that I got the job because I was Black. Despite everything, or because of it, I accepted the position.

I remembered it as a very small community, and a small high school, where they really nurtured teenagers, but very quickly I learned that things would not be like my memories. At the first meeting in August, the teachers started talking about the students, saying nasty, negative things like, "It's time for the animals to come back." I said to myself, "Is this how they referred to me?" Others would joke, "Thirty-five years until retirement," and they would laugh. Were they all laughing at me?

When the school year started I felt undermined a lot of the time, even by teachers who tried to be nice. They would not stop telling the students that they had me in class when I was a student. Here I was, trying to get my class to see me as an adult, which is hard enough because I am a young Black woman who lives in the neighborhood, and these teachers kept on reminding everyone that I used to be their student. One teacher, who did not know me, even stopped me in the hall and demanded to know where I was going. I had to tell him that I was a teacher. Though this was only one teacher, I think his reaction to me because I am young and Black is indicative of the atmosphere in the school.

When I went into the faculty room, what I thought was the faculty room, you know, lots of smoke and coffee, I felt like the other teachers were trying to turn me into something I did not want to become, somebody like them. When they talked to me about the students, they would say, "When you were here, it was so much different. These aren't the same kind of kids as you." But I kept thinking to myself, "What could have possibly changed in eight years?" The same stupid stuff that kids are doing now, we were doing then. I do not see the intelligence of the students as less than it was eight years ago.

I finally concluded that it is not so much that the kids have changed, it is the teachers who have changed. They have gotten older, less patient with teenagers, especially Black, Latino, and immigrant teenagers, and they reject the more open ways of teaching and relating to students. Educational practice and theory have changed, but unfortunately the teachers have not. When I try something different, or interesting in my classes, they always respond, "That is all well and good, but what about the Regents (state) exam?"

I like to have a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, and I do not keep the desks in rows; we usually sit in a circle and I let students choose their own seats. I am also lenient as far as homework goes. I think my whole approach to the classroom gets the students to think, "Oh, she's cool, she's not like one of them."

So far, this approach is working for me for some reason. All of my observations have been good, but after my last one, the chairperson

said that I need to have the students see me as more of an authority figure. While he was speaking, I kept thinking that if he keeps treating me as if I am still a child whenever he sees me in the building, how does he expect the students to react to me as an adult?

A problem I face with the older students is that they have spent two or three years in high school doing the bare minimum, and I am trying to get them to do more. I had a fight with my eleventh-grade class because they told me how the rule was that three paragraphs make an essay. Well, I changed the rule. I said that in my class four paragraphs make an essay and I struggled with them to learn how to write more. When they ask what to write, I say, "Write what you learned. Write what you think." I tell them that writing is not about what the final exam requires, it is about what you need for life.

I feel that the things I was taught to do in high school, these students are not taught to do. The high school is different than it was eight years ago, not because of the students, but because some teachers have just given up and the climate of the school is different. I am sure the situation is similar at most minority and inner-city schools. As a young teacher, I find this sense of surrender scary and disheartening. When one of these teachers moans, "Oh, these kids," I think to myself that I am one of these kids. What they are saying is insulting to students and to me. The teenagers in my classes are as intelligent as I was and they have so much potential, but how can you expect young people to respond in school when their teachers have no faith in them.

I know some people think that I have an advantage being successful with my students because I am African American. I think it gives me a head start, I admit that. I have an edge because I can relate more to their lives and I am familiar with their music, the magazines they read, and the television shows they watch. They are glad to see me and I think they are more willing to trust me. But that is only the beginning. There are African American teachers who are out of touch with their students and White teachers who find ways to connect. If you are boring students to death, if you do not respect them, it does not make a difference if you are Black or White.

My biggest thrill as a first-year teacher is the response I get from students. In the school I am known as the Pied Piper. I really love to be with them and they like to hang out with me. I go to every football and basketball game. They see me there and know that I care, but you do not have to be Black to do these things with your students. One young White woman teacher wore African clothing in the school fashion show and the students loved her for it.

A big issue we have to face as educators is the way that schools replicate injustice. I do not accept it. Partly that is because I am Black, but you do not have to be Black to think that injustice is wrong. At my high school there are a small number of White students and most of them are in the higher academic and honors classes. These classes have a mixture of White and Black students, Chinese and Latinos. All of the high-achieving students travel together; they have traveled together since they were sorted out in third grade and they are kept separate from the rest of the student body. They are the students whose parents are professionals or active in the Parents Association. In retrospect, my feelings about being nurtured here may well have been because I was in this special group. What I am discovering now is that this experience is not available to everyone, but it can be. I took my regular track classes on a trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City to see an Egyptian exhibit. It was the first time a teacher had taken a class to the city in three years. Other teachers told me: "Don't take those kids into the city;" "They are going to leave you;" and "Someone will break something." I told my class that if they screw up this time, they will be the group that screws it up for everybody. You know, we went to the museum, had a great time, and they were so great.

I want to end with some advice I try to keep in mind for myself.

1. When students are doing something wrong in class, I do not just let it go. They need to have demands made on them if they are going to rise to expectations. But on the other hand, I do not just sit there and admonish them. I take them out of the room and we talk. The key is to treat students with respect.
2. I did some cooperative learning and it did not work. Instead of blaming the students, I tried to figure out what I did wrong. I decided to make the activity more structured so the students would learn how to work in cooperative groups. Rule number two is do not blame the students when the problem is the way you are organizing the class.
3. Sometimes, I find myself getting into a preaching mode in class and I have to stop myself from talking too much. Anytime I get thirsty, I know I am talking too much and I stop myself. I always try to figure out ways to get them involved in the lesson. When they are involved, that is when they are learning. I guess this final point means it is time for all of you to get involved in discussion, because that is when we are really learning.

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6

COMMUNITY: HOW DO YOU BUILD CLASSROOM COMMUNITIES COMMITTED TO EDUCATIONAL GOALS?

How do you build classroom communities committed to educational goals? It takes time, attention to broad goals, and concern with the details of daily living. In [Chapter 4](#), I discussed experiences at Camp Hurley that helped me understand the importance of relationships between students and teachers, and their impact on young people. One of the things I learned as a counselor and young teacher is that communities always exist, but they do not always include the people in nominal authority (teachers) or a commitment to the goals of dominant institutions (educational achievement). When a group or class appears chaotic, it is often because adolescents have coalesced around their own agenda and leadership, like the group that ran away to see what the rain was doing to their drainage ditch. The struggle for teachers is not just to build classroom communities, but to build communities committed to educational achievement. I believe this requires the creation of democratic communities with student leaders and community members who feel they are part of the decision-making process.

In my experience, as students develop relationships with each other and their teachers, find interest in the topics being explored, have confidence that they will not be put down, and are convinced that their ideas will be heard, they develop a commitment to the success of the class, to questioning and knowing. They take responsibility for themselves and each other and become a community of learners. As an increasing number of students become committed to the class as a democratic community, they draw their classmates in with them. Students who initially were suspicious or aloof follow the leadership of their peers and get swept up in the maelstrom.

On the surface, some of the things that build classroom community seem like minor things. Yet, they are the things that ordinary people do for each other. When a teacher gives a student a break or helps them out of a jam, all the other students seem to know and care about what happened. When a teacher lends out pens, treats students with respect, loans someone money for lunch or the bus, plays ball with students after school, attends a school play or game, or visits a family struck by a tragedy, the teacher is saying to his or her students that we are all human, we are all family, and we must stand together. By example, the teacher is modeling for students what it means to be a community member, and inviting students to join. One of the defining moments in the movie *Stand and Deliver* (1988) is when Jaime Escalante, the math teacher, visits a restaurant to persuade its owner to allow his daughter to return to school.

Community can become contagious and empowering. One year, when I was teaching an honors class in an inner-city high school with a weak academic reputation, students pledged that every member of their study

team would pass the state's standardized exam, or none of them should pass the class. Before the test, we all put our hands in the middle of the room, like at a football rally, and shouted. When the papers were graded, one student had failed and she and her study team came to meet with me. I told them I knew they all worked hard and would not hold them to their pledge. But they insisted and only agreed to accept passing grades if I let them prepare her for a retest and promised to reverse all of their grades if she failed again. On the second try, she passed with flying colors.

This chapter begins with the story of Linda Christensen, a high school English teacher from Portland, Oregon. I read a number of articles by Linda in a newspaper for teachers, *Rethinking Schools*, where she discusses her efforts to build classroom community. Rachel Thompson of the New Teachers Network explains how she tries to develop community in her middle school classroom. Justin Williams looks at the importance of community building in classrooms populated by those he calls “chocolate” and “caramel” colored children. Online essays discuss using comedy and hip-hop in the classroom, cooperative learning, and developing community and student leadership during a high school social action campaign.

Section A: Can Community Emerge from Chaos?

Educational philosopher Maxine Greene (whom I have the good fortune to have known as a friend and mentor) believes that the human mind provides us with powerful tools for knowing ourselves and others. She encourages teachers and students to combine critical thinking with creative imagination in an effort to empathize with and understand the lives, minds, and consciousness of human beings from the past and our contemporaries in the present. Greene sees the goal of learning as discovering new questions about ourselves and the world. This leads her to examine events from different perspectives, to value the art, literature, and ideas of different peoples. For Greene, learning about the world and democratic community building are part of the same process. Greene (1995) argues:

Teaching and learning are matters of breaking through barriers—of expectation, of boredom, of predefinition. To teach ... is to provide persons with the knacks and know-how they need in order to teach themselves. No teacher, for example, can simply lecture youngsters on playing basketball or writing poetry or experimenting with metals in a chemistry lab, and expect them to meet the requirements or standards she or he had in mind for that activity. Teachers must communicate modes of proceeding, ways of complying with rules and norms, and a variety of what have been called “open capacities,” so that learners can put into practice in their own fashion what they need to join a game, shape a sonnet, or devise a chemical test (p. 14).

But how do you persuade teachers and students to do these things? The most honest answers I have ever read were by Linda Christensen. Many of the articles she has written for the newspaper *Rethinking Schools* have been collected in her book, *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up* (2000). Three that I find especially helpful to me as a teacher are “Building Community from Chaos,” “Discipline: No Quick Fix,” and “Writing the Word and the World.”

Linda began “Building Community from Chaos” by explaining to readers, “I read a book on teaching that left me feeling desolate because the writer's vision of a joyful, productive classroom did not match the chaos I face daily. My students straggle in, still munching on Popeye's chicken, wearing Walkmen, and generally acting surly because of some incident in the hall during break. Too often, they were suffering from pains much bigger than I could deal with: homelessness, pregnancy, the death of a brother, sister, friend, cousin due to street violence.” I suspect not much has changed in the last ten years or so except now the students are probably plugged into iPhones, iPods, and iPads.

Each new school year, Linda started with the “misconception that I'm going to create a compassionate, warm, safe place for students in the first days of class.” But new students quickly reminded her that community is created out of shared relationships that develop over time, and that before she can build a classroom community, she must find ways to connect with her students and for them to connect with each other.

Linda called her collected essays *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up* because in her classroom, reading and writing are fundamental to community building and human empowerment. Linda has her students “plumb their lives for stories,” stories that they share with each other. This process helps them discover common themes. “Students who stung privately with humiliation discovered that they weren't alone.” Common

themes, shared understandings, and the experience of reading and writing together become the building blocks for classroom community.

Another valuable teaching activity used by Linda and her co-teacher Bill Bigelow “to promote student empathy with other human beings” is the interior monologue. For an interior monologue, students imagine the thoughts of a character in history, literature, or life during an event that they are studying. Linda believes that this activity develops social imagination (a variation of what Greene called creative imagination), which allows students to connect with the lives of people “with whom, on the surface, they may appear to have little in common.” Students read their dialogues out loud in class, which allows the entire group to discuss their observations and arrive at new understandings about people. Again, sharing builds understanding, respect, and community.

Linda believes that it is a mistake for teachers to ignore “the toll the outside world” exacts on students. She begins the semester by having students interview each other, to establish that their identities and questions are at the center of the curriculum. Readings are selected to explore the issues that students raise.

One semester, when Jefferson High School students were caught up in a storm of violence, she had her class read *Thousand Pieces of Gold* by Ruthanne Lum McCunn (1991). The novel includes an uprising by Chinese peasants who rampage through the countryside. Some of the outlawed peasants organize into bandit gangs, where they re-create relationships that were lost when their families were destroyed. As her students read about these Chinese rebels, they discussed conditions in their own communities. As they better understood their own lives, they began to recognize what was happening in the Chinese society they were studying.

One of the things I enjoy about Linda is her willingness to discuss the difficulties she has as a secondary school teacher. In “Discipline: No Quick Fix,” she describes how she struggles along with her students to become intellectually and emotionally aware of her own choices and prejudices as she tries to develop a classroom community each year. Linda recognizes the difficulties for a teacher to relinquish her or his control over the curriculum, her uncertainties when student decisions push classes into uncharted waters, and her concern that after all of their efforts, a cohesive classroom community might not emerge.

Despite my enthusiasm for Linda's classroom, I have gotten mixed reviews from teacher education students when discussing her stories with them. A math student teacher wrote in her journal, “Sharing power and passion are important experiences for students, young people, everyone. But how do you bring this stuff up in a classroom with a curriculum that doesn't involve these topics? Especially for me, where the topic is actually math. What can I do to get my students' attention?”

Another student wrote, “Linda shares with students her stories about a hard life, her father's alcoholism, lack of education, not being a good student. This helped her open up with her students. I do not know the direct effects of gang war or gunfights. I do not have a wealthy family but we live a comfortable life and are close knit. If I have nothing in common with my students, will they trust me?”

I decided to address these issues by borrowing a page from Linda's book on teaching. I asked these students and others to read their comments about Linda's classroom and questions about teaching to our class. As students read and spoke, common themes emerged, and it quickly became apparent that students in my class

were not really writing about Linda and her classroom, but about themselves, their concerns about relating to their students, and their apprehensions about becoming teachers. And just as Linda described, “Students who stung privately with humiliation discovered that they weren't alone,” and common themes, shared understandings, and the experience of reading and writing together become the building blocks of our classroom community.

For me, Linda's approach to community building seems valid no matter what your subject area. It means that teachers must continually seek out ways to connect lessons to the lives of their students, be willing to allow students an arena of choices, and not be afraid to go off on tangents. Learning and community building are usually not done in straight lines.

We also had a serious discussion about whether attitudes expressed in the “sanctity” of the teachers' room or privately held prejudices and beliefs affect the way teachers function in their classes and treat students. Part of this discussion included whether student teachers, or other teachers, should respond to people who make derogatory remarks about student intelligence or racial and ethnic groups. While we were having these discussions, I noticed four things.

1. while some people were speaking to the class, some members of our community were sitting with friends, talking with them, and passing notes back and forth.
2. Two leaflets were being circulated around the room during community discussion.
3. While members of our community were speaking, other people held their arm up to attract my attention.
4. Some members of our community freely volunteer to discuss their experiences whereas other community members only speak when called on.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—“DO WE NEED A *SICHA*?”

(From a handout distributed in a seminar for student teachers)

On an Israeli collective farm (kibbutz), important decisions are made at a community meeting called a *Sicha*. Last week we established three simply stated, yet profound, rules for our classroom community. We based them on two songs performed by Aretha Franklin, “Respect” and “Think.”

1. **Respect.** Respect yourself. Respect others.
2. **Think.** Think about the implications of the things that you say and do and their impact on other people.
3. **Freedom.** Maximizing the freedom of individuals to participate, learn, and grow from student teaching and this seminar requires individual and group responsibility and a commitment to rules 1 and 2 (respect and think).

Do we need a *Sicha*? Should we discuss these issues today? Yes? No? Why or why not? Please vote and then write the reason for your ballot. Be prepared to share your reasons with the class.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is your opinion of the issues and process for community decision making raised in this handout? Explain.
2. The handout and the ensuing discussion took place in a teacher education class. Do you believe this process could be effective in a middle school or high school classroom? Explain.
3. Do you believe that Linda Christensen's ideas for building community from chaos could work in your content area? Would you be willing to try her approach in your classroom? Explain.

Section B: How “Teacher Tricks” Can Help Build Community

As I said earlier, small things can make a big difference. Here are a few basic rules from “Alan’s big bag of teacher tricks.” I call them teacher tricks because I want to emphasize that these are not innate qualities of master teachers. They are skills that anyone can learn.

Learning Student Names

One of the most important things you can do is to learn student names—quickly. People—and students are people—like when you know their names. It is a sign of respect and a statement that they belong. But learning new names is not always easy.

- You learn names by using them. The first few days, take attendance and keep referring to students by their names. Some students have a way of “sticking out” on the first day. Learn their names immediately. They will be more inclined to cooperate as you establish procedures, and when you refer to them by name, it will seem to the class as if you know all of their names.
- Assigned seats help. I think I have “relational memory.” I see a face in a familiar spot and I remember a name.
- The top line on every handout should have space for a student to place his or her name. Over the first few weeks, as you grapple with 150 or so new names and faces, this will help you remember who people are. As students work, walk up and down rows, chat with them, get to know them, and learn those names.
- Do not be afraid to forget some names. I tell students, “Next year when I see you in the hall, I will smile, but probably not remember your name. I have to delete old files to create space in my memory for new names.” I do not know if this is technically true, but students like the computer analogy and do not seem to mind when I forget their names.
- I have had students whose families were from all over the world, and the names that gave me the most difficulty were Hindi names from India. They seemed to consist of a long string of consonants and few, if any, vowels. Usually students had abbreviated Anglicized versions of their names that they used in school, but they appreciated that I tried to learn their real name, no matter how much I butchered it.
- I am notoriously poor at language acquisition, but I also try to learn a few words from each of the languages spoken in class, even if only to say hello to parents on “open school night.” As with names, students forgive a lot if they believe that you tried.

Memo Pad

In discussions with family, friends, and colleagues, I have a tendency to get anxious and interrupt people while they are speaking or trying to organize their ideas. I have the same problem with students in my classes, especially when I am nervous about getting a point “just right.” I learned to carry a memo pad and pen and jot down my ideas, rather than blurting them out. I find that as a result, I am better able to hear people through to completion and more selective about my comments. Since readers of this book are certainly more technologically proficient than I am, you can probably do the same thing using some sort of electronic device.

I started to use the memo pad as a regular part of my teaching and it became an important tool in building

classroom community through directed discussion. As students work independently or in groups, I circulate around the room and write down notes about the ideas of individuals. I also tell students when the connections they are making are very good and encourage them to present their discoveries to the class. During full-class discussion, I use the notes in my memo pad to call on students who I know will introduce specific ideas into the discourse. I also know who disagrees with them, so I can call on those students, if necessary, to generate student-to-student interaction and discussion. When it is going well, discussion takes off and I can withdraw into the background, occasionally asking a student for further clarification, settling the class if arguments get too heated, or calling on students who are having trouble breaking in and adding their ideas to the mix.

Discipline Problems

I do not write disciplinary referrals on students in my classes. If we are a community, or hope to become one, we have to handle these things as a community. This is fundamental, because it makes the idea of community real for students. For example, I allow students to use the bathroom without permission as long as the room pass is available. If one student goes for extended walks and monopolizes the pass on a regular basis, it is the community's problem and the community must address it.

Please note that this does not mean I neglect to document problems in writing or keep counselors up to date on developments. But it does mean that involving outside disciplinary authorities is a last resort only used under extreme circumstances. If you have a serious confrontation with a student, you can always shrug your shoulders, roll your eyes, suck your teeth, and back off. Remember, you are the adult.

Smiley Faces

I know this seems ridiculous, but high school students like “smiley faces,” rubber stamps, and stickers. One marking period, I started to give every student in my ninth-grade class a smiley face if he or she passed every subject on their report card. A student who had passed every subject but one asked if she could have a smiley face, too. I explained that I could not give her one, but I assured her she was a good student and would get one on her next report card. For reports and homework assignments, I use cartoon rubber stamps that say, “Brrrrrilliant,” “Terrific!” “You will make a world of difference,” “Needs Work—Please Fix,” “Keep Trying,” and “Please See Me.” The absolute best reports receive a turtle sticker. Although the stickers and stamps may be a little silly, students do appreciate getting positive feedback. The stickers and stamps also become part of our class's special rituals.

Contact with Parents

I make home visits for a number of reasons. A student is sick or in the hospital and misses a lot of work and time, there was a family tragedy, or I am having trouble connecting with a student and I think personal attention will help. On occasion, I ride my bicycle or walk around the community meeting students and family members. Once, I was riding my bicycle home from school on a lovely fall day when I bumped into a student who had cut my class. I said, “What gives? I want you in class.” The next day, not only was the student present, but everyone in class had heard the legendary story about how I had tracked him down in the neighborhood and made him go to school.

I find that phone calls to parents at home or work, especially when a student has a history of trouble in school, are really impersonal and often unwelcome. They say to a parent, "Something is wrong with your kid. They need to be punished." Although parents should know what is going on and be a partner in the education of their children, the reality is that once a student is a teenager, problems at home are not so different from problems at school, and parents have limited coercive power. An option is to try calling home when you have good news to share. It is guaranteed to put parents in a more cooperative frame of mind and to win you friends among your students.

At a minimum, I try to open any home contact or open-school visit with a positive statement. "I like your son." "Your daughter has done good work." "Your child has a lot of potential." If possible, I prefer three-way conversations, at home, over the phone, or in school, so students know I am not just "dumping" on them, and so I can ask them how they see the situation. Before open school night I organize a special project in class and videotape students at work, presenting or performing. I play the tapes for parents while they are waiting for conferences. The tapes are tangible examples of what their son or daughter has achieved. And if their child is missing from the tape, it is evidence that something is wrong.

Section C: Becoming a Teacher: What Does Community Building Look Like?

I Struggle for My Students, Not Against Them

by Rachel Gaglione Thompson

Rachel Gaglione Thompson believes that her experiences growing up have been fundamental in shaping her work as a teacher. She was a smart student but did not like school and often cut classes. She dropped out of a regular high school in ninth grade because she felt that the rules were too constricting and the teachers did not really care about her. Eventually, Rachel entered and graduated from an alternative program. Today, she believes that part of her problem was tension at home. Both of her parents were police officers, and job-related stress was a source of conflict between the two of them and between them and hers. Reflecting on what was happening as she grew up has helped Rachel to understand what is going on in the lives of her adolescent students. Currently, she teaches in a junior high school, but hopes to eventually work at an alternative high school. "I want to go back into that environment and help young people who are like me when I was their age. Many teachers can be successful working where I work now. But those students really need me. Because I came from there, I feel a sense of responsibility to return." Ten years later Rachel Gaglione Thompson teaches seventh- and eighth-grade social studies in the same community as where she started but at a different school, and is mom to a 6-year-old girl.—Alan Singer

A teacher's most important job is to pay attention to what is going on with students and to care about what happens to them. Caring puts the majority of them on your side, which helps you with everything you have to do as a teacher. I have never been afraid to show students that I care about them. If your feelings are genuine, students will respond. My teaching motto is "I struggle for my students, not against them.:

The fight for my students begins in my classroom from Day 1. I work toward building a sense of community by building on the idea that we are a union, in this together. We cannot succeed as individuals. We need to help each other, speak to each other, and must listen to each other. One student asked me why I always make them listen to each other. I told him, "We can learn from everyone, not just the teacher." I believe a lot of the world's problem's would be resolved if we would just take the time to listen.

I find that most students like my approach to classroom community and they work hard to achieve our class goals. We set rules and procedures as a class. If we need to address a problem, I ask them how they would like to address it. This gives them a strong sense of what it is like to take responsibility for themselves and others and what it means to work together. I deal with conflict between students or between myself and a student by trying to calm the situation down, not aggravate it. If a student is angry with me, I am the one who needs to turn the situation around. I do not need to win, but a child may act irrationally, driven by their own need to save face. If a problem is getting too heated, no learning will take place for the student and probably the class. I try to avoid fighting or arguing because I know kids want to have the last word. I know I always did at their age. But if I allow that to happen, it can undermine our class community. It is often better to just let the conflict fizzle out. Nothing is so important that it cannot wait until later. I rarely eject any student from the room—it's our classroom and we have to work together, the Dean is not part of our community—but I will sometimes suggest that a student go for a walk with the pass for a little while. At this age, students genuinely sometimes need a few moments to gather themselves.

Conflicts between students are more difficult to resolve because two student egos are involved, not just one. Although many teachers claim you need to address bad behavior or put-downs as they arise, I do not do it that way. If one student calls another a name, even a racial name, I tend to just say, "That's enough." I am not sure this is completely appropriate, but I believe that handling something on the spot often makes the situation worse and gets us all off track. We can get back to the issue and deal with it as a community as needed when the tension has eased off.

It is important to establish patterns for community relationships and conflict resolution at the beginning of the school year. But even then, students must continually be reminded about the decisions we reached on how we will relate to each other. Instead of lecturing the class about behavior when they are acting inappropriately, we do group work activities and projects that reinforce my ideas about working together and caring about each other. We are constantly working on listening to each other. I continually experiment with new student-centered group activities and regularly make use of any technology available to me. I've never been one to not let a "bad" class use the laptops. In fact, I am more likely to make sure that the neediest kids use technology first. I find that when school is fun and relevant, students will be more willing to cooperate with each other and will learn more. Even after all of these years, I put most of my effort and time into figuring out new ways to be interesting and motivating. Students actually recognize, comment on, and appreciate the amount of planning that I do.

Because I pay attention to them, I have been able to help students work through problems that would have interfered with their school work if allowed to continue. I had a boy in my class many years ago who never purchased the loose-leaf binder that is required in my school. I wrote a note on his homework and told him that I had an extra binder he could have. About a month later he asked me, "Could I have that loose-leaf you talked about?" I said, "Sure. Tomorrow." I did not really have an extra one in school. I meant to pick one up, never did, and that night I forgot about it. The next morning when I was already at school I remembered. I tore my room up before I found a

one-inch black binder, just the kind this boy would like. When I gave it to him, he was in shock. He said, "For me?", like he could not believe it. I think it made a difference that year for him. Another year, a student who had graduated the previous year left a four-page letter in my mailbox telling me how much she missed my smile every morning and how much she appreciated my caring.

I advise people who are thinking of becoming teachers to spend a lot of time in classrooms and with children talking with them about what is important to them. Teachers need to be up-to-date on the realities of teenage life including new technologies, movies, music, styles, books, and television shows, and should be familiar with the neighborhood where they plan to teach. While I definitely recommend eating right and getting plenty of sleep and exercise because the job requires a lot of energy to do it right, the most important part of teaching, at least for me, is to show kids that you really care about them.

When I originally wrote this piece over ten years ago, I thought I would have moved on to a high school by now. Instead, I have found that the middle school environment affords me a meaningful and direct influence on students that I do not want to trade. I always thought of myself as a teacher who teaches the students no one else wants. Middle school is generally a place where teachers start and get out as soon as they can, but it has been the best place for me. At the school I work at now I teach classes ranging from CTT to Regents Accelerated and each student is important to me. They have vastly different needs academically, but building and maintaining a strong sense of community is crucial for each and every one of them to perform to the best of their ability. The middle school adolescent years bring with them so much insecurity and change that students need the stability of a strong teacher in a community classroom. My students of all levels take my breath away with their insight, personal connections, and curiosity. They are a brand new challenge and spark for my teaching. I spend more time planning now than I ever did before and I still love it.

My years of experience in the middle school classroom, as well as working as an adjunct professor and as a doctoral student, have changed my teaching outlook. I remember being a wide-eyed first-year doctoral student, reading research about education that I had never heard of in my years in the classroom, school professional development or education classes. I spoke to a friend of mine about all the work in the world of educational research that never makes it to the classroom. Some of it would be so helpful and yet the two worlds rarely meet in any meaningful way. It is one of my goals to bring valuable educational research into my classroom and to work toward building community not only in my classroom but also between students, their teachers, and researchers.

By far, however, the greatest changes that have come to my teaching approach have come from having become a parent. Motherhood completely changed how I perceive my role as a teacher. I have more empathy for my students now as young adults and for their parents. I cannot forget that the little souls who sit in front of me are someone's pride and joy. I also view my students now much more as little people who are really so young and so eager, sometimes too eager, for adulthood. Earlier this year, after I had assigned a Document Based Question on U.S. imperialism, one of my students emailed me with concerns over her ability to incorporate prior knowledge into her essay. Her email said, "Up until a few weeks ago, I didn't even know the United States HAD colonies. I don't really have any prior knowledge." At that moment I felt the weight of my responsibilities as a social studies teacher, of being the one who is going to expose students to things they had never known before, some of those being quite questionable. By the end of every school year I teach my students the standard middle school social studies curriculum, which includes U.S. actions regarding imperialism, violations against civil rights spanning over two centuries, dropping the bomb on Japan, and Japanese internment, just to name a few.

I always knew I had a responsibility to my students as global citizens; being a mom has made me painfully aware of my responsibility to them as human beings.

Teaching “Chocolate” and “Caramel” Colored Children

by Justin Williams

Justin Williams is an English teacher who thinks deeply about literature, teaching, and social issues. Most Americans would consider him African American or Black, but he rejects being categorized that way and prefers to refer to himself and people like him as “Chocolate people.” In this essay he talks about the impact of race on students in the United States and the role sports played in his life, especially shaping his concept of community. — Alan Singer

I was born in London, England, and lived in South London until I was almost eight years old. At that time my parents, who were originally from the English-speaking Caribbean, relocated the family to the United States. We lived in Brooklyn, New York, for a couple of months before ending up in the town of Uniondale in suburban Long Island.

My grandparents, who lived in Jamaica and Trinidad, sent their children, my parents, to London in the 1960s to finish their educations. Many middle-class West Indians went to London to study because as former British colonials they did not need a visa to travel there. In London the neighborhood where we lived was all White except for my family. I attended an all-boys convent school where I was one of the very few Chocolate students. When we settled in Uniondale, New York, my neighborhood was predominantly White, although it soon began to change and in the span of 1981–1991 it became mostly Chocolate and West Indian. Because I came to the United States from England and then lived in a predominately White suburban community, I tend to view race and racism in the United States as an outsider. I think this gives me a unique perspective on the impact of race and racism on students and American society.

In high school I was an honor student. My mom and dad stressed academics but I also had a strong foundation from my early years at the English convent school. Initially that was a problem. When I came to the United States I tested on the fifth-grade level, but was placed in the third grade because of my age. This led to boredom and some misbehavior in school.

I started playing organized sports almost as soon as I arrived in the United States. I played baseball, but the first few years I was not very good. Cricket was my favorite sport to that point. My dad was an excellent cricket player in England. I wanted to be like him. However, once I got the hang of the differences between the two games, I started to get pretty good. In middle school I had a baseball coach who was also my social studies teacher. He was both a brilliant history teacher and a great coach. Under his tutelage I became a really, really good pitcher and also played shortstop. We began to beat teams we never beat before. I was also a pretty accomplished musician. I started to learn how to play the saxophone when I was in third grade and in my senior year in high school I performed with the all-county symphonic band.

In my first year of high school (tenth grade, since our district had junior high schools rather than middle schools) I played four varsity sports; baseball, football, indoor and outdoor track. I was Nassau County champion in the 100-yard dash that first year. Around the same time, I was playing four different positions in the infield of the baseball team. Sports helped me to become very disciplined. Because I played multiple sports, from seventh grade onward I never got home before 6:30 pm. I would come home in the evening, eat, and do my homework. Even if I had to stay up until 2 am I got my homework done. My circle of friends primarily included athletes and we supported each other in our desire to both perform well in sports and do well in school. A lot of us were in honors classes and the band, orchestra, or theater program.

As a result of my academic and athletic performance I had 70 to 80 scholarship offers from major universities all over the country. In 1990, after my junior year in high school, I verbally committed to attend Pennsylvania State University. There has been a lot in the news in the last few years about Jerry Sandusky, a long time and retired coach in the Penn State football program. Like everyone else associated with the teams of the early 1990s, I had no clue about the real Sandusky.

A major reason I chose Penn State was that during the Joe Paterno era the graduation rates for his football teams hovered between 80 and 90%. In 2012, Chocolate and White players graduated at an identical 87%, unheard of for a major college football program. I remember when Coach Paterno sat with my family in the den of our house and told my parents that he could not guarantee their son would play football at Penn State, but he could guarantee that I would get a college degree. His strategy was to recruit your mother. Once mothers fell in love with the idea of their sons being taken care of by Joe, Penn State was usually where they were going to end up. My parents visited the campus and town and decided it reminded them of England.

The promise by Coach Paterno was a part of his grand experiment. He recruited kids of all colors and cultures that could academically perform at Penn State and also could play football at the highest level. All things being equal, he wanted bright athletes and believed that a naturally bright student made a better ball player. I became part of an extended family at Penn State. I still work with alumni from the program and new team members. It saddens me to see how the unforgivable crimes of Jerry Sandusky have diminished our accomplishments and Joe's legacy at Penn State.

I started out as a mechanical engineering major because as a teenager I dreamed of going into the Air Force or Navy and becoming a

pilot. I read an autobiography of Chuck Yeager in the fourth grade and I just loved it. I repeatedly watched the film *The Right Stuff* as a child. It documents Yeager's role in the advances made in jet propulsion and its relationship to the dawning of space exploration. *Top Gun* starring Tom Cruise was also one of my favorite movies. When I graduated from high school I was 5'10" and 170 lbs., which was a perfect size for a pilot. I figured, even if I could not achieve that dream, I would study aerodynamics and use that as an entry into the aerospace industry. Then I discovered how much chemistry I had to take in college. Suddenly, I did not want to be an engineer all that badly. In my sophomore year, I decided to become an English teacher.

English was always my strongest subject growing up. My parents bought me books as Christmas presents and I spent Christmas vacations reading them. I also remembered that when I was in my senior year of high school, a teacher told me, "Don't forget about teaching." I was respectful at the time but in my head I was like "No way!"

In elementary school I loved the Encyclopedia Brown series and I read everything they had in the autobiography section of the library. In late elementary school I began to read classic literature like *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moby Dick*, and books by Hemingway and Dickens. Since we considered ourselves English, in my house I was exposed to the poetry of Shakespeare and Percy Bysshe Shelley. When I was in the sixth grade I went to bed with the lights on the night I finished reading a horror book, Stephen King's *Pet Semetary*. The book scared me to death. Reading these books, even the scary ones, helped me to develop my imagination and with it my entire mind. Love of reading is a powerful tool for developing literate and thinking human beings.

Since earning certification I have had good luck securing teaching positions, although my second job, teaching tenth- and eleventh-grade English, was at a school almost 60 miles from my hometown. One reason I took the position was because it was in one of the most racially and economically diverse towns on Long Island. It is a town with trailer homes and palatial estates. It had a very old African American community dating back to the early eighteenth century, when there was still slavery in New York State. Most, but not all, of the Chocolate and Caramel families in the town were poor. Among the White families there was a sharp economic divide. Some were really rich and others were really poor.

Although the community was diverse, inside the school was racially segregated. Almost all of the students labeled as special education were Chocolate, and 99% of the students in honor classes were White. When I started to bring this to people's attention they looked at me like it was something they had never even thought about before. My colleagues saw nothing out of the ordinary about this divide. I decided to challenge the status quo and placed some of the Chocolate kids who I knew were talented but needed support into my honors classes.

As these students advanced beyond my classroom, they experienced a crippling lack of support in their desire to cross the color line, and the system would not allow them to remain in the honors program. However, being exposed to the nurturing yet academically challenging nature of my honors classroom changed them. Sitting and succeeding with White kids challenged their deeply ingrained perceptions of themselves. Many of the White students also had to adjust their preconceived notions of racial identification.

For family, personal, and professional reasons, I eventually decided to move to a school closer to the Uniondale community where I was raised. Over the next few years I taught at elite schools serving the affluent and in poorer communities where students were recent immigrants with limited English proficiency, until a position finally opened up in Uniondale. I have been a teacher in my hometown for the past eight years. I believe it is very important that teachers feel a connection to students, school districts, and communities where they work.

In a number of important ways the Uniondale school district may be unique. It is a suburban district where the student population overwhelmingly has "Chocolate" and "Caramel" colored skin. But because of family incomes and a commercial tax base, teacher salaries are relatively high, the teaching staff is stable and experienced, and there is money available for supplies. My supply budget at the first high school where I worked was \$150 for the entire school year. At Uniondale, I get whatever supplies and technology I need for my classes, something that is virtually unheard of in a district where 98% of the students are from the English and Spanish-speaking Caribbean as well as Central and South America. The down side of this is that some teachers stay in the district, especially some of the White teachers, who do not fully connect with the students and do not really want to be there. Some of these teachers grow bitter because they think they are blocked from moving into administrative positions because of who they are, but this is more of an underlying feeling and is rarely explicitly expressed.

Whatever difficulties you face as a teacher, one of the best parts of the job is that you can close the door and do what you need to do to connect with your students and teach. I enjoy watching the light bulbs go off when students understand something new. I enjoy the fact that I grew up here. At their core, the kids in Uniondale have not changed that much over time. The world may have changed, but they are still young people who want an opportunity to excel. They want a chance to have a go at life.

One problem with our educational system as it is currently conceived is that everybody is expected to be exactly the same and perform the same on standardized tests in standardized classrooms with standardized teachers and curriculum packages. I think it is a mistake to push every kid into the college track when many would be better off if they learned a marketable skill while in high school. Vocational

education has disappeared in the United States and needs to be brought back. That is how you get students onto the path to social mobility and build an economy.

I have the same negative response to the educational policies of both of the major political parties. I see Republicans and Democrats as two sides of the same coin. Forget the war on crime, the war on drugs, and the war on poverty. The only war since the beginning of time that has ever really been fought is the war between the rich and everyone else. I want my students to think critically about the way the world is organized. I press literacy because they need to tear apart and look inside and outside at speeches by public officials and news articles and opinion pieces that are trying to persuade them to support individuals or political positions. Every candidate has a proposal to revive the economy. Students have to be able to understand their messages and use their experiences and the experiences of people in their community to help them frame a response.

If anywhere, my political perspective comes into play when I select authors and literature for my students to read. My favorites still include Hemingway, Shakespeare, Faulkner, and W. E. B. DuBois. We read a lot of nonfiction including works by or about Langston Hughes, Walt Whitman, and Tupac Shakur. We study the writings and thinking of American anti-slavery abolitionists such as John Brown, Charles Sumner, Thaddeus Stevens, William Lloyd Garrison, and Frederick Douglass. I was an athlete and I am still very athletically active, but I do not look up to athletes. The people who risked their lives to challenge slavery are my intellectual heroes. However, I confess they pale in comparison to my father.

I certainly do not press my views about authors and their works on students, but I probably do more leading than I would like to think. My goal is to create spaces for them to voice what they think about stuff. I actually never tell them what I think about politics or literature until they tell me what they think. I always have students research the authors before reading what those authors have written. I will ask, "What three things do you think you should know about the author?" I get them to tell me why they feel these things are important. For example, why should we know when a person lived? I want students to see the importance of historical context in influencing personal experience and beliefs. "Oh Captain, My Captain" by Walt Whitman only has meaning if you understand it was written at the end of the American Civil War in response to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

At the end of the day I want them to understand that all these authors they are studying were at some point in their lives just like them. They had hopes, dreams, and aspirations and were not sure what they wanted to do with their lives. We research the authors to learn what questions motivated their thinking and what messages they were trying to convey about life and the world in their writing.

I like to think of literature as a tool for opening possibilities. It lends itself to new interpretations and opportunities for students to express their views in oral and written form. You would be surprised at how limited the opportunities are in schools for students to share what they think. It really is an amazing thing to witness when students are granted an opportunity to analyze text and a place where they are free to say what they actually believe. The intellectual explosions that occur in a classroom are intoxicating for a teacher.

Post-Script: I share with Justin the belief that it is important for students to learn work skills as part of their education, but I would not restrict it to students in a vocational track. I believe an important part of secondary school should be having and holding a job. Having a job means learning to take responsibility, having to work under supervision, acquiring valued skills, seeing the connection between the world of school and the world of work, pursuing something to the end even when it is difficult, solving problems, negotiating relationships with supervisors and co-workers, and earning some money so you can contribute to your family. Working on a job should complement what we are trying to do in schools, to motivate students to perform better in the classroom, if for no other reason than they want to keep their outside jobs.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS

Questions to Consider:

1. In your view, what qualities make Rachel and Justin successful teachers?
2. How did Rachel and Justin figure out how to be successful in the classroom?
3. Were their life experiences handicaps or sources of strength as they became teachers?
4. What aspects of Rachel and Justin's approaches to teaching do you agree with or disagree with? Explain.
5. If you were on a school's hiring committee and knew about Rachel's history as a student and Justin's political views, would you have interviewed either of them for a position or been willing to hire one of them? Explain.

Section D: How Do “Corny Teacher Jokes” Help You to Be “Real”?

I used to tell “corny teacher” jokes to my own children during dinner. If I got a pause followed by a groan, I knew I had hit it just right. The purpose of the corny teacher joke is not to get a belly laugh or to have your audience rolling in the aisles. That would be too distracting and interfere with the flow of a lesson.

The “corny teacher joke” is like a change-up pitch in baseball. It succeeds because it is unexpected. It catches the attention of students who are “drifting off” with a statement that is incongruous, and by catching their attention, it brings them back into the lesson. It also helps relieve tension.

I like to frame my corny teacher jokes as questions, but they can be slightly ridiculous statements or implausible instructions as well. Try to include one in every lesson plan (that was a corny teacher joke). Stu Stein, a high school teacher and a member of the Hofstra New Teachers Network, is a former stand-up comedian. When he finds that a class is drifting or if things are getting dull, he likes to toss out a quick one-liner. In his case, however, he is convinced that his jokes are not corny.

Stu argues that the most important thing for connecting with students, or any audience, is being “real.” He uses mock laughter at his own “bad” jokes and pretends to look around in surprise when the class laughs at something he says. According to Stu, “If students know you are apt to make irreverent comments, they are far more likely to pay attention. They do not want to miss the next joke. The trick is finding the balance between irreverence and education.” He also thinks I need a new comedy writer.

Online you will find comments on comedy in the classroom by Adam Gellender (E10), a high school science teacher who specializes in physics. As anyone who watches the *Big Bang Theory* on television knows, physicists can be a particularly quirky (quarky?) brand of people. There is also a hip-hop dictionary for those of you who are having difficulty connecting with the language of the younger generation (E11).

Some Warnings

1. If you use the same corny teacher joke too often, it becomes a class mantra. When you say the opening, they respond with the punch line, and soon it will get on everyone's nerves—so try to be judicious.
2. Your goal is not to make anyone feel bad. Apologize if you overstep the “line.” I have had students answer my jokes with their own wisecracks. My response is, “I guess I deserved that.”
3. Avoid sexual innuendo. No matter how funny, it is not appropriate in school.

Some of Alan's Worst

“Do you have to take a make-up test to become a beautician?”

“If you get detention, should you take de-aspirin?”

“Is it a coincidence that dogs and teachers both are licensed?”

“Why did the rabbit fail math? It could multiply but not divide.”

“Oh, no! The computer ate your dog.”

“There is no such thing as a stupid question; (pause) this is just the wrong time.”

“Don't think of it as homework, think of it as quality time with your computer.”

“What do you get if you cross a teacher with an anteater? Someone who can't keep their nose out of your business.”

“What do you get if you cross a teacher with a lawyer? A teacher with a suit.”

“What do you get if you cross a teacher with an elephant? A teacher you can never forget.”

“What do you get if you cross a teacher with a donkey? My seventh-grade math teacher.”

“What do you get if you cross a teacher with a pit bull? A riot as students run for their lives.”

Middle School Students Love Bathroom Humor

Alan: “Don't cut! I had a student who cut my class to go to lunch everyday. The only thing he passed was gas.”

Eighth-grade student: “That joke stinks.”

Alan: “So did the gas.”

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—CORY TEACHER JOKES

Educational researchers have actually studied the use of humor in the classroom. According to an article in the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's *Education Update* 43 (5), "Make Me Laugh: Using Humor in the Classroom," teachers can use humor to put students at ease, get their attention, demonstrate their humanity, and reduce the psychological distance between teachers and students.

Questions to Consider:

1. When you were a student, how did you and your friends react to teachers who thought they were funny? Why?
2. Do you think humor is an important part of a teacher's repertoire? Explain.

Section E: Online Essays on Cooperative Learning and Developing Student Leadership

Cooperative learning is not completely new. Students taught and learned from each other in colonial and frontier America; fans of author Laura Ingalls Wilder know that cooperative learning was used in her one-room prairie schoolhouse. As a result of the ideas of educators such as John Dewey and Francis Parker, cooperative learning was popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and many teachers continue to use elements of cooperative learning in group work, projects, and reports. *Circles of learning: Cooperation in the classroom* (Johnson et al., 1993) is an excellent resource for implementing cooperative learning in the classroom.

As with any other educational “innovation,” advocates of cooperative learning frequently disagree with each other about the best approaches and the most important goals. However, some common points do emerge in the educational literature and in teacher discussions.

1. Cooperative learning enhances student interest because it gives them a greater stake in what is happening in their class and in their education. In large classes, it provides students with more individual attention because they are involved in helping each other. Students at all academic levels, including students in need of remediation and academically advanced students, seem to learn more and to learn more effectively, in cooperative learning teams.
2. Cooperative learning enhances the social skills and values that are important for future academic and economic success, and that are essential for participation in multicultural, democratic communities.
3. Teachers must be able to define their own classroom goals and experiment with the approach or approaches that are successful in involving their students in learning.

In an online essay I discuss ways that I use cooperative learning to promote both student learning and classroom community (E12). A second essay looks at ways to promote student leadership as part of classroom and school community-building (E13).

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CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FOR BOOK II

A PRO/CLASS Practices Approach to Dealing with Classroom and Other Professional Problems

I usually do not like to use case studies to talk about dealing with classroom or other professional problems. I think case studies give you a false sense of preparedness. In the abstract, it is much easier to be reasonable in a case study because you have little at stake. In the classroom, dealing with real people and under the pressure of making decisions on the spur of the moment, it is much more difficult. Your feelings, and those of the other people involved, tend to get in the way. Responses to case studies can lend themselves to scripted conversations and, in my experience, the situations that arise in classrooms are anything but scripted. More important than having a script are your ideas, your goals, and your concern for students. Every situation is unique and every student needs to be treated as an individual. As with clothing and shoes, one size never fits all.

An added problem is that each school or district has its own guidelines and administrative procedures for guidance and for disciplinary action. Many schools practice what they call “zero tolerance” toward infractions or have a very strict and detailed code, which allows teachers little leeway once a problem is reported. In some of these cases, conflicts that could easily be handled as educational or counseling issues are handed over to the police for adjudication. Although I have not worked under these dire circumstances, I have taught in schools with what I considered punitive approaches to student discipline problems.

My approach, as I have explained, is based on building relationships of trust and responsibility between students and between students and teachers within a classroom community. My general policy about discipline is that when possible it should be handled within the classroom community. It also involves “creative maladjustment,” which includes bending the rules to make them work for my students and myself. I always tell students that if they are honest with me, I will support them if they have conflicts with school authorities or other teachers. At a minimum, I can attest to their honesty in our relationship. But if they lie to me, and I cannot trust them, I cannot offer them support.

My first recommendation to every student teacher and new teacher is to find out what supervisors and parents expect from teachers when there are classroom problems, to learn guidelines established by both the school and the law, and then to figure out how you can satisfy the school and legal expectations while remaining faithful to your goals for teaching and beliefs about teenagers. Veteran teachers, mentors, and union representatives can be very helpful here. In my experience, supervisors, parents, and students respect teachers with integrity, especially when they have a record of success with students. Usually you will find room for teacher judgment even under the strictest regime. However, sometimes a particular school or district may be the wrong place for you to work. Online you will find three essays paired with this mini-chapter: “Frank McCourt Eats the Sandwich” (E14), “Why I Am Pro-Union and Pro-Teacher” (E15), and “Why Tenure for Teachers Is Important” (E16).

Student teachers and new teachers are often extremely nervous about managing classroom problems. But remember, by the time students are in your secondary school class, they have been in school for between 7 and 12 years. They know the rules for proper classroom behavior. In fact, the only one who is uncertain about the rules is probably you. That is why teenagers are sometimes “playing you” for all it is worth. It is an

entertaining part of the schoolhouse game. What the props do is help you to remember that you are the teacher and in charge of the class. You decide what happens. The best weapons in your arsenal are your teacher voice and body language. You have to learn how to say it like you mean it.

I have a couple of “props” I offer new teachers for help. My three best props for building up your confidence are a jar of “M” or “mean” pills, to help build up your fortitude (really M & Ms); an Incredible Hulk T-shirt that warns students, “Don't Make Me Angry, You Won't Like Me When I'm Angry”; and a silver wand, topped by a star and covered by glitter (à la Harry Potter) that you can wave around the room to get attention. Very few student teachers or new teachers have ever borrowed the props, but I think just the idea of them helps people gain perspective on what is happening in classes.

With all of these reservations in mind, I will present school situations that happened either to me or to members of the New Teachers Network and my ideas for responding. Rachel Thomson (whose responses are in italics) also offers ideas on some of the situations from her perspective as a younger female teacher working in a middle school classroom. Please remember that these situations and responses involve choices and judgments. We are not offering rules for behavior.

I divided the examples into four categories: classroom problems, guidance-related issues, relationships with colleagues, and conflicts with school policies. I recommend writing down your own ideas before comparing them with ours. After finishing, you need to join the conversation and discuss what you remember about your own experience as a student and adolescent, and your approach to “classroom and other professional problems.”

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—THINGS TO REMEMBER FROM ALAN'S BIG BAG OF TEACHER TRICKS

- The only one you can control is you.
- Never take what students do “personally.”
- You can be both firm and caring.
- If you can, wait before deciding what to do. Give yourself a chance to relax and think.
- To quote Mary Poppins, “A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.”
- Once you have their attention, get softer.
- You can always suck your teeth or shrug your shoulders, and walk away from a situation.
- Try to ease up a bit. Laugh at yourself. There is always tomorrow (Oh no!)

Questions to Consider:

1. By this point you have read a long way into this book and thought quite a bit about your own views on teaching practice. How do you react to these tips? Why?
2. What would you add to the list? What would you take away? Explain.

Section A: Some Complicated But Pretty Standard “Classroom Problems”

1. A student sits with his head down. Other students are talking with neighbors. Even though the school rule is “no hats in class,” several students ignore you when you ask them to take theirs off. How should you respond?

There is a broader problem in this room and I do not think a “quick fix” is likely. The issue is not the behavior of individual students, but the overall class tone and the ability of the teacher to give direction. As a beginning teacher I took this kind of situation as a sign of personal failure and I used to get very frustrated. Later I learned that it takes time, hard work, and a systematic approach to build classroom community. In this class, I would try to develop a core of students committed to learning and interested in the lessons and use them to win over the others. When you have most of the students, it is easier to deal with the problems that come up. Then you can speak with “Mr. Head Down” privately, while other students are working on an assignment or after class. Ask him if there is a problem you can help with. Tell him you really want him involved in class. Ask what signal you can give him in the future to “bring him back into the fold” before he drifts too far off.

Humor helps, whereas confrontation only escalates the situation. Whisper in his ear. Tickle his hand with a feather. Cover the “body” with a coat. Sometimes my “class rules” included threats to report “evil step-mothers” to child abuse authorities for not allowing students to get enough sleep at night or “recidivist hat wearers” to the health department for endangering public safety (rules on hat wearing appear to date from an earlier historical period when head lice was a big problem in schools).

When students complain that they are too embarrassed to uncover their heads, I point to my unruly mop and welcome them to the bad-hair-day club. The thing is, if a class is going badly, these things cannot be dealt with effectively on an individual basis, and if a class is going well, it is not worth spending too much time or effort on something like this. If a student still balks after your best efforts, you can always throw up your hands, shrug your shoulders, and suggest they do their hair before they come to class next time. Everyone will laugh and the situation will be less likely to be repeated.

The key things to remember are that it does not help to get angry, it will take time to change the classroom tone, and relationships with students will win you allies. In addition, if students are behaving this way in your classroom, other teachers in the school are probably facing similar problems. You should not be afraid to seek the advice of colleagues whom you respect on how they are addressing these issues in their classes.

Rachel Thompson—I have NEVER grabbed a hat off of a student's head. How would you like it if someone did that to you? I ask, “Can you please take your hat off for me?” Usually a simple and polite request works. Sometimes, if it is a student I do not know, he or she will look at me strangely in shock that someone asked them nicely to take the hat off. The few times when this does not work, I say something to bond us together like, “Look, it's a groovy hat. I dig the Mets too, but the principal says we can't wear hats in school. You know he always pops into the room and, if he sees you with it on, he's going to try to take it from you and he's going to get mad at me. Just please take it off for me. If you think someone might snag it from you, I'll hold it and make sure no one touches it.” I do not think this has ever failed to work. It requires a commitment to mutual respect and trust.

2. A student teacher was having difficulty settling a seventh-grade class right after their lunch

period. After playing outside, students would run into the room shouting and pushing each other. No work was getting done. How should she handle the situation?

This student teacher was on the verge of giving up. She had started yelling at the students, but instead of quieting, they got noisier. This one class was sending her home with a headache every day and souring her entire experience. Finally, we met and came up with a strategy that worked. She placed an aim question and instructions on the board before the class so she would not be preoccupied with other tasks. She met students at the door and blocked their path to force them to slow down. When a student was calm, they were given an assignment sheet, told to start their work, and allowed to enter the room. Really rambunctious students were required to remain on the side in the hall until they had “their act together.” After a couple of days, she had established that students were expected to enter the room quietly and begin their work. She was also able to talk with them about the kind of class they wanted to have. The students still roughhoused in the yard and the student teacher had to meet them at the door, but they settled down much more quickly and learning was taking place in the classroom.

Rachel Thompson — I always have a class like this line up in the hall and calm down a bit before they enter the room. Usually, they just need some time to wind down. In addition, I would start the lesson with a quiet individual activity, not group work.

3. **It is springtime. It is getting warm outside and the thoughts of young men and women turn away from high school. Cutting is increasing, especially at the end of the day, at the same time you are trying to prepare students for standardized end-of-the-year tests. What should you do?**

The tendency in most schools is to tighten the screws and get punitive, but I found punishment counterproductive. Many students simply stopped coming to class at all. The strategy I found most successful was being more of a “presence” in the building by wandering around during my free periods. Once I had spotted a student during the day, they were much more reluctant to cut a class later on. Once I went down to the gym after school to say good-bye to students going on the senior trip. I met three students who had cut my class that day lining up for the bus. If I had fingered them, their trip was over. I only nodded and said I would see them when they got back. Embarrassment and good faith seemed to work. None of them cut my class again.

Rachel Thompson — The only way I can see to beat this one is to make the reviews and classes even more fun than normal. Incorporate a game such as Trivial Pursuit, Jeopardy, or Who Wants to be a Millionaire? This is definitely the scenario for a learning project that touches on many things, without having quiet time. Sitting and reading is the last thing they want to do. This is a good time of year to experiment. One June my class made “human” physical maps. Some of the students were rivers; others were mountains. One was the Continental Divide. Students had to dress appropriately. Lakes, for example, wore blue. It got a little crazy in the room, but they all came to class!

4. **A member of the New Teachers Network refused to admit a student who was chronically late coming to class. He stopped her at the door and requested an explanation. A young man whom he did not know, but who was evidently a friend of hers, came up to them and started cursing at the teacher. The young man threatened to “hurt” the teacher if he did not stop bothering his “woman.” The incident was observed by another teacher who reported it to the**

dean. How should the teacher respond?

This is a very difficult situation and a lot depends on school policy. If the teacher filed a formal complaint with school authorities, both the young man and young woman would probably be suspended and the young man would face arrest. The teacher decided to take a guidance, rather than a disciplinary, approach and declined to file a complaint. Instead, after speaking informally with the dean and apprising him of the situation, he got the young woman's schedule from the program office, found her later in the day, and they walked through the halls talking. The young woman responded to the attention and concern and they agreed on the following plan. They decided that if she came to class on time in the future and was able to change her attitude, the teacher would not make a formal complaint about the incident to school authorities. However, the teacher would call her home and speak with a parent. He would tell them that she had been doing well up until this point, but he was concerned about a pattern of lateness to class. She could then discuss her own concerns about school with her parent. The teacher also offered to speak with the young man about what had happened, but did not make this a condition for resolving the situation. Although he never spoke with the young man, the situation with the young woman improved. The teacher is also convinced that his decision not to be punitive improved relationships between him and the class and contributed to a generally enhanced class tone.

- 5. Students in a first-period class are chronically late. If the teacher starts the lesson at the beginning of the period, the late arrivals have no idea what the class is doing. When the teacher decides to wait before starting lessons, even fewer students arrive on time. What should the teacher do?**

This one always drives me nuts. It seems you are damned if you do and damned if you do not. If you do not start the lesson at the beginning of the period, you are telling students that they do not have to be there. I tried to address this problem (not always successfully) by reorganizing my lesson and starting “at the bell” with something that was not crucial. As soon as students arrived they went directly to work, but I would not launch into the main point of the lesson until we had a sizable crowd. At the end of the period, we would discuss my concerns that some members of the community were hurting our efforts by coming to class late, and ask them all to make a special effort to arrive on time. I would also offer to call the home of students with “irresponsible parents” who were not getting them up on time. This would usually solve the problem for students who were hanging out outside with friends. Some students have real problems that are not handled so easily. They may have to take a younger sibling, or their own child, to school or day care. I try to meet with these students individually and find a way to address their problem that keeps them coming to school. They may need a program change that allows them to start the day at a later period.

Rachel Thompson — Take a walk to the local food mart before homeroom — that is usually where you will find them. If students are eating breakfast, consider letting them eat in your room. Start class with a really fun activity so those who miss it are jealous.

- 6. A member of the New Teachers Network has a student who just cannot sit still. He fidgets, gets out of his seat, talks to students sitting next to him, and shouts out answers or questions. The student is distracting her and disrupting the entire class. What should she do?**

I was that child and I remember being punished by teachers for things I could not control. I try to approach

the situation by thinking about things that would have helped me. Often teachers seat “disruptive children” in front and in the middle of the classroom, so they can ride herd on them. But if the student could be controlled in this simple fashion, neither the teacher nor the student would have this problem in the first place. I recommended that the teacher talk with the student about what was happening in class and ask him where he wanted to sit and what kind of rules would help him to behave in a different way. She and the student eventually arrived at the following accommodation that allowed them both to function in class: She agreed to place the student in a seat at the side of the room by the window so he could look out when he felt the need, look through a book or draw, stretch without bothering other people, and even stand up without being disruptive. She also agreed to let him go to the bathroom (really for a walk) when he asked. For his part of the bargain, he agreed to do all of his work, to pay attention when something was important, to try not to talk with neighbors or shout out during class, and to return quickly from the bathroom. They even worked out a signal so she could get his attention without embarrassing him in front of the class. She would walk by his desk and without saying anything, just tap on it quietly.

Rachel Thompson—This student needs to be kept busy. Make him or her a monitor giving out supplies, books, or homework. You can also let students know it is okay to get out of their seats to go to the garbage can. Many students grow antsy when they are not allowed to get up. If they know they can get up if they need to, they may be more able to relax. However, teachers need to emphasize that if students disturb other people, they lose the right to leave their seat.

- 7. A member of the New Teachers Network had an especially unruly class. Trying to establish some control over the class, she instituted lunchtime detention. Instead of calming some of the students, the threat of detention seemed to make their behavior worse. What should she do?**

The problem with lunchtime detention was that students wanted to be there. The atmosphere was much nicer than in the cafeteria, where students tended to push and shove each other and the adults were always screaming. At lunchtime detention you could read, talk with your friends, or play on the computers. We discussed the situation at a New Teachers Network meeting and a number of members explained that they had “turned the problem on its head.” Instead of having lunchtime detention, they made lunchtime an optional free period for students who wanted to stay in the classroom. They established rules for behaving during the lunch period, which students eagerly followed (and enforced), and stated that students could not stay for lunch if they misbehaved during the regular class period. The lunch period gave teachers a chance to develop relationships with students that supported positive class leaders, calmed disruptive ones, and, by enhancing classroom community, spilled over into the regular class periods.

- 8. As a younger teacher, I liked to play basketball with students during lunch or after school. Sometimes students would curse at each other or use racial epithets. Should I respond and if so, what should I do?**

I decided to use the basketball games as teaching opportunities. Because the students wanted me to play, they were prepared to listen to what I had to say. They also liked the idea that, because we were not technically in school, they were not required to do what the teacher said. The games helped me teach students how to work cooperatively, how to care about and include others, how to work within rules, and how to control their tempers when disappointed or upset. They also established contexts for discussions in class about

use of language and the impact of racial epithets on participants, communities, and the broader society.

- 9. Students were asked to read an excerpt from George Washington's Farewell Address that discussed domestic issues confronting the new nation, summarized its main ideas, and explained the historical context of the document. The previous year I had given a similar assignment based on the Farewell Address, only the excerpt focused on foreign policy concerns. One student handed in a paper based on the previous year's excerpt. What should I do?**

Although the problem of cheating on reports has been exacerbated by the ability of students to download material from the Internet, it basically remains the same. I caught this student because the assignment had been tailored in a particular way. When an assignment is unstructured or open-ended it is much easier to copy someone else's work. I always warn students, "I do not want to turn on my computer and find your report." Sometimes, however, the warning is to no avail. In this case, I decided to meet with the student and discuss what I had found, but not the issue of cheating. If I accused her of cheating it would become a disciplinary matter and be referred to the department chair for further investigation and potential punishment. I got the student's schedule from the program office, found her later in the day, and we walked through the halls talking. I explained that she had done the wrong assignment and I was concerned because what she handed in had been assigned the previous year. I did not ask her to explain or confess, but did ask what she thought she should do. She asked for the opportunity to do the paper again without penalty. I agreed under the condition that something like this did not happen in the future. Although I did not tell other students about our discussion, many students from my class saw me come to the room and speak with her. I suspect word that she had been caught but given a second chance quickly spread. I hope this demonstrated to students that I was both vigilant and fair.

Decades later I met this woman while doing a workshop with students at a high school. She was now a social studies teacher and a dean. She greeted me warmly and thanked me for having been her teacher, although we did not discuss this particular incident.

- 10. I suspected that a student in my class was cheating on multiple-choice tests, but I had not caught him cheating. I did not want to make the atmosphere during tests uncomfortable for all students because of my suspicions about one of them. What should I do?**

I often warn students not to copy because the person sitting in the next row might not have the same test. Sometimes I reproduce one test with two different cover pages, one labeled form A and the other form B. Sometimes I place questions on the first page in a different order. I rarely do more than that. In this case, I was sure the other students "knew" what was going on and decided to set a trap. On the next test, I gave this student his own test. It had the exact same questions as everyone else's, but the choices were arranged in a different order. When I gave the test back, he had the nerve to raise his hand and complain that he had the same answers as the person sitting next to him, but his were marked wrong. I reminded him that they probably had different tests, and the entire class started to laugh. I spoke with the student later and confronted him about cheating. He confessed that "maybe he copied some things." We agreed to discount both his earlier scores on multiple-choice tests and his failing grade on this examination, if he kept "his nose clean" for the rest of the school year.

Section B: Guidance-Related Issues Can Be Very Thorny and Can Raise Legal Questions

- 1. I have often been approached by students in my classes who want to discuss a personal or school-related problem, but before they will talk about it, they ask me to “promise not to tell anyone.”**

The first thing you need to tell the student is that you can never promise in advance “not to tell anyone.” As a teacher you are professionally and legally responsible to report certain disclosures, especially physical or substance abuse and threats of violence. If a student decides to tell you something that is personal, they are trusting your judgment as a concerned and caring adult. But they must be aware that you may have to report what they say, either to a parent or to a school official. The next thing I ask is if there is a friend they would like present while we talk. I do this for two reasons. It may make it easier for the student, and it provides a witness to what took place. We live in a very complicated world and a teacher must protect himself or herself from accusations made later by a disturbed student or a distressed parent. I often find students just need a friendly ear, a chance to cry, or a warm hug. Unfortunately, as a male teacher, my actions may be misconstrued. Again, because of the complications of the world, I have developed professional relationships with female counselors or teachers in my schools, and when necessary and as quickly as possible, I involve them in the discussion. I have also faced more serious issues. I have had young women tell me they are pregnant and do not know what to do or that they are being sexually harassed. I have had students report friends who they fear are on drugs or suicidal. Students have also come to me with legal problems, especially involving immigration. In most cases the school has crisis intervention counselors and I have persuaded students to speak with them. Sometimes I have succeeded in getting the student to speak with his or her parents. In other cases, especially when they need legal assistance, I have referred them to outside community agencies.

- 2. There is an undercurrent in a class of boys teasing and poking girls. None of the girls have said anything.**

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, a number of school districts reported a surge in student-on-student sexual harassment incidents. Most school authorities simply attributed it to more systematic reporting. I believe it was actually a combination of three other factors. Instead of treating inappropriate behavior by boys toward girls as a teaching opportunity, school officials are wiping their hands of the matter and either punishing students internally or turning them over to the police. I find this policy misguided and irresponsible. The second factor is that the definition of acceptable behavior by boys toward girls has changed since I was in junior high school. The boys back then were horrible. If we were punished according to the standard in effect today, I think we all would have been arrested for teasing and touching. Last, there has been much more attention in schools to bullying of all types. New attitudes toward gender equity and appropriate behavior are overwhelming improvements, but violations should be treated as learning issues and community concerns, not as punishable offenses. The girls need to talk to the group about how they feel when a boy snaps their bra or makes fun of the size of their bosom, and the boys need to understand the pain they cause when they target or demean someone. If schools and teachers address the teasing and poking before it escalates, most problems can be avoided, relations can be improved, and students, both male and female, do not have to be marked for life.

- A student speaks, dresses, or behaves in ways that suggests a possible homosexual orientation.**
3. **Other students are gossiping about it or teasing the student.**

The first question is, what is the problem here? Too often, teachers and school officials act as if the problem is the student who is being victimized. But that student has the right to be the way he or she is, whatever that happens to be, and the student does not have an obligation to answer to anyone for his or her sexual orientation or sense of style. For me, the difficult issue is how to address the biases of the overall student population without stigmatizing students who are perceived as different. It is the same issue whether students are teased or gossiped about because of their ethnicity, race, disability, social class, academic performance, or interests. In this case I would be preemptive and press for a school policy and curriculum that respects diversity, tolerates all forms of difference, and challenges oppressive or discriminatory behavior. I think the school must be prepared to meet with parents or students who reject homosexuality because of religious beliefs. However, in our society, these parents and students are legally responsible to respect the rights of others. In addition, given the pressure on people who experience being different in our society, schools should provide a range of counseling services and support groups.

4. **A student's personality appears to change. He or she becomes sullen and his or her performance in school is deteriorating.**

When students appear to change personality, especially when they become sullen and their performance in school is deteriorating, they are sending out a signal that they need help. Our job as teachers is to recognize the signals, show concern, and provide support. As a teacher, I try to reach out to students and ask them, "What's happening?" Students who feel connections to adults rarely hurt themselves or others. Again, schools should provide a range of counseling services and support groups. We need to address problems before they become emergencies.

Section C: Relationships with Colleagues Can Be Tricky

1. A student who does well in your class is constantly in trouble with one of the other teachers.

When a student is failing one class or keeps getting referred to the dean by one teacher, it can affect his or her performance in every subject, with class time missed because of hearings and suspensions, cessation of attempts to learn, or disappearance from school altogether. My first action is to recommend to the student that he or she talk with the teacher about the problem. If the student feels he or she cannot, or if the results of such a talk are unsatisfactory, I try to mediate the dispute. I ask the student what he or she thinks the problem is and if he or she would like me to speak with the other teacher to help find a solution. I try to be careful not to blame the teacher, no matter how upset, or seemingly justified, the student is. There are always multiple sides to a story and the student's behavior in response to the teacher was certainly counterproductive. Usually both student and colleague are glad to have the intervention because it offers the possibility that the situation will improve. On occasion, we arrange for an especially upset and disruptive student to sit in my room and do work for the other teacher, instead of attending the regular class. This gives both the student and teacher time and space and allows the conflict to defuse. In many middle schools, teachers who have the same students meet as teams and this facilitates this kind of networking. I have had colleagues who tell me to get lost. In these situations, I generally back off. However, in extreme cases, I have raised the problem with department chairs or informed the dean that I had another view of the problem. An additional reason for becoming involved, though a bit self-serving, is that it helps me to develop a relationship with the student and with the rest of the class.

2. Students complain to you about the way they are treated by another teacher or the way that another teacher teaches.

This is a slightly different case from the previous one because the students have taken the initiative. My initial response is that the students need to learn how to work with many different kinds of people and that the first step is to talk with the teacher about the problem. If the students feel they cannot, or if the results are unsatisfactory, I have a decision to make. If it is a cooperative colleague that I am comfortable with, I will speak with them about the problem, trying not to identify the specific student(s). If the colleague and I do not have a good working relationship, I can speak with my supervisor or with the other teacher's supervisor about the student complaints. If there is a history of similar complaints and the students are in danger of failing or exploding, I might go with students to their guidance counselor and try to facilitate a transfer to another class. I have to confess, I have not always handled this sensitive situation with sufficient diplomacy and I have made enemies.

3. Colleagues are openly and publicly talking about individuals or groups of students in ways that you find unacceptable.

A lot of my friends recommend staying away from the teachers' lounge in order to avoid these kinds of confrontations. They find responding is useless at best, aggravating at worst. Lois Weiner, whom I mentioned earlier, believes it is possible to maintain cordial relations with all colleagues and suggests smoothing over potential conflicts. I was never willing or able to follow her advice. Sometimes you must take a stand on an issue and cannot avoid making enemies. When colleagues openly and publicly talk about individuals or groups of students in ways that I find unacceptable, I acknowledge their right to their opinion but challenge what

they have to say and their right to say it in an unprofessional manner. If they continue, I inform them that I will not hesitate to report our conversation to appropriate supervisors. Over the years, many teachers have supported my response. They are upset when colleagues disparage or demean students and are glad when these teachers are confronted.

Section D: Disagreements with School Policies

- 1. Senior teachers recommend that you contact parents when students are either misbehaving or falling behind in their work. You are uncertain when you should call, what tone you should take, and what you should say to parents.**

As a parent, I have been on the other end of calls home. I got upset when a teacher was officious with me, disparaging about my children, or just read from a long list of grievances. I sometimes asked teachers, “How would you feel if you were on my end of the phone?” or, “What exactly do you want me to do?” When a student is acting up or slacking off in school, there are generally other things going on in his or her life. Their parents are also probably having difficulty getting them to respond and act appropriately. By the time most students are teenagers, parents can rarely force a difficult student to behave. A conversation will be much more fruitful if you talk about a student as a human being, rather than as a “problem,” show parents that you are genuinely concerned, and respect the parents as people who would like their children to do well in school and life. Ask them if they can tell you something that will help you be more effective as their child's teacher and ask if there is something you can do to support what they are already doing. If at all possible, try to find something positive to say, at least that you look forward to meeting them and working with them in the future.

Rachel Thompson—I like to make “good conduct” calls to tell parents when their child is doing well. Students like the idea and will come up to you and ask if they can get a “good conduct” call as well. If you call about a student who is misbehaving, pay attention to the response of the parent. If the parent is standoffish, just tell them you wanted them to be aware of the situation, say “thank you” and “goodbye.” if the parent is angry, try to calm them down and do not call them again. Word gets out among students when you make either type of phone calls.

- 2. Some of my students are fooling around in the hall during a change of period and refuse to identify themselves to a security guard. The security guard asks me for their names so she can report them to the school administration and have them suspended. What should I do?**

This happened to me on more than one occasion and it can be a difficult situation to resolve. If you identify the students, no matter what they did, they will dismiss you as a “rat” and an adult who just wants to “get them.” It will jeopardize your ability to reach them and other students in the future. On the other hand, you do not want to undermine a co-worker. Most school security guards are concerned about students and act professionally. If you tell the security guard that you will take care of the situation, they are usually glad to leave it up to you, especially if you have treated them with respect in the past. If you and the security guard still disagree on what to do, suggest that you go to the appropriate school authority together and try to work it out. It is crucial, however, that if you promised to speak with the students, you do it. Word travels quickly around a school. If you do not follow through, the security guards, administrators, and students will not believe you in the future.

- 3. In many districts, if a student is found with a knife or any other weapon, it means automatic suspension and sometimes arrest, being expelled from school, or both. There are also school districts where possession of an aspirin or a cell phone is grounds for suspension. In the middle of a lesson, you witness a student picking at his nails with a pocketknife. What should you do?**

This is a difficult situation because it involves student trust, school policy, and legal issues. I face it a couple

of times a year. I am not making a general recommendation. You must use your own judgment and decide based on the situation and based on your conscience, ability to take risks, and goals. If I know the student and have confidence in his or her judgment, I will approach quietly and explain that if I report seeing him or her with a knife he or she risks suspension and arrest. However, if I report that I found a knife on the floor and turn it in to school authorities, no further action will be taken. The student has to make an immediate decision. If the knife is on the floor, the situation is over. Twice, over the years, the knife was not found on the floor. On both of those occasions I notified security personnel and the student was removed from class.

Rachel Thompson—My response depends on who else knows and what else is happening. You can get into serious work trouble for not reporting an incident like this, especially if students have made threats. I have had two experiences similar to this one and handled it differently each time. We went on a senior class trip to Washington, D.C., and a few students bought souvenir knives from a street vendor. A parent chaperone witnessed this and informed staff. Later, one of the students set off a metal detector while entering a building. We asked students for the knives, but no one turned one in. When we returned to the school, the teachers decided to report the entire incident. The second time I was involved in a situation with a knife, I was escorting a class out of school at dismissal time. A boy pulled out a small knife and started cutting his nails. I spoke with him, realized he meant no harm, walked him home and told him never to bring it back to school. Although the safer thing to do in these cases is to report it, that may not be the right thing to do.

4. Your school has a zero tolerance policy toward fighting. You witness a fight in the hall and know the participants. If you report them they will be suspended. Should you break it up, report the students to school authorities, or both?

I do not condone fighting, but I also know that sometimes conflicts between students go too far and confrontations become physical. As a preteen and teenager I was involved in some fights in school and in the street. My policy is to give combatants and their friends a chance to resolve the situation. If I know the students, I step between them. If they are grabbing or hitting each other, I try to pull away the student who is getting the worst of the encounter. While I have him or her, I turn to the crowd and give their friends a choice. If they can calm them down, get them out of there, and prevent a reoccurrence, everything is over and done with and we can all walk away. If their friends cannot stop the fight or if it starts again later, the entire incident gets reported to school authorities and everyone gets suspended.

5. What if what I say or do turns out to be the wrong decision? Should I report a poor judgment or an inappropriate action to school authorities?

No one said life or teaching is easy. When I started working as a bus operator at the New York City Transit Authority, the union shop steward recommended that we admit nothing, avoid putting statements in writing, and, if pressed for a formal report, ask for time to think about what we wanted to say. I think it was good advice. In the work world I learned not to lie, but also not to offer more information than was requested. I found that lesson made sense in schools also. Sometimes, however, you need to talk about an incident or a question with someone. If you have a good relationship with a senior colleague or with a supervisor, you can often have an “off-the-record” conversation that will help clarify issues. That is probably your best bet. If an off-the-record conversation is not possible and there is a union in the school, you should consult your representative. What you are obsessing about is probably not such a big deal and has happened to many

people in the past. If it is a real problem, the union representative will advise you how to proceed. In some circumstances, if it is allowed under the union contract or by law, your representative can be present at formal meetings with supervisory personnel.

Rachel Thompson—No two people will handle a situation the exact same way. However, one thing is universally true: Cover-ups never work. If you are a new teacher, ask for advice from a trusted colleague. You do not want to lose your job, but more important, you do not want anyone to get hurt as a result of your decision.

BOOK III

PRO/CLASS Practices—Literacy, Assessment, Support, Struggle

[Book III](#) focuses on special topics: literacy, including technological literacy; assessment of student learning and teacher performance; support for students with social or psychological problems; and the struggle, as a student teacher and beginning teacher, to be the best teacher that you can be. It includes an appendix with an annotated list of websites useful for teachers.

7

LITERACY: HOW CAN TEACHERS ENCOURAGE STUDENT LITERACIES?

What skills and knowledge does someone need to fully participate in a modern, technological, and democratic society? Efforts to answer this question are a major part of the national debate over educational standards and the performance of schools. It is a difficult question to answer because what people need to know is constantly changing. For example, I joke with students that when I was in high school in the 1960s, we were not allowed to use pocket calculators in math class. This was not because teachers were stricter or educational standards were higher, but because miniature calculators had not yet been invented. As recently as 1983, when my in-laws offered to purchase a personal computer for my family, my wife and I did not know what we would do with one. Today we each have our own computer at home and at work plus a laptop and iPad we share, and we do not know how we would manage without them. Technological development has fundamentally altered what we mean by minimum competency skills.

An additional problem is that minimum competency is not everyone's goal. Few of the people reading this book would accept it as the standard for themselves or their own children. Why should it be an acceptable standard for anyone in our society?

To actively participate in today's world, a citizen must be able to gather, sort, and evaluate information on a number of topics, from a variety of sources, using different technologies. For example, to effectively select candidates for office, citizens should have at least some information about other countries, the workings of the nation's economy, educational programs, and environmental concerns. If they want to influence the ideas of their neighbors, they must be able to express ideas orally and in writing, as well as know how to interact with and organize diverse groups of people. Because each citizen will probably also need to earn a living, maintain a home, and raise a family, they must be comfortable with basic math, familiar with new technologies, and even conversant in more than one dialect or language. The twenty-first century is certainly a complicated place. A number of commentators have made the point that the technology of literacy has probably changed more in the last 20 years than it did in the previous two millennia.

A useful definition of *literacy* is the ability to participate in a conversation with a level of competence and confidence. This requires both skills and knowledge. In the early 1980s, public television produced a documentary on nuclear weapons called *Nuclear Strategy for Beginners*. A scientist from the Massachusetts Institute for Technology who was interviewed for the project explained that concerned citizens did not need to know technical information such as “the size of the screw you put in the nuclear warhead,” but they should understand “something about what it does ... about the effects of nuclear war, ... about the possibility of

trying to control such a war.” This would enable citizens to be involved in discussion and democratic decision making about nuclear policy. I think this is a good example of literacy in a particular academic area. Because every subject has its own competencies, and different aspects of a culture require distinct knowledge and skills, it is helpful to talk about *multiple literacies*.

A traditional distinction between elementary and secondary schools is that in early grades students “learn to read,” whereas in middle school and high school they “read to learn.” Many secondary school teachers still insist that their primary job should be to teach content to students who already possess the required skills. However, the rapid pace of change means that people are continually learning new skills or enhancing old ones throughout their lives. Teachers must prepare students to live in a world that we can barely envision.

For me, the best way to prepare students for this new and complex world is by promoting critical literacy, which means teaching students how to think, organize ideas, and express them. No matter what academic discipline you are preparing to teach, your students need to learn how to learn, to find and evaluate information available in different formats, to think systematically, to support arguments with evidence, to present ideas clearly, and to evaluate their own work and the work of others so they can participate in conversations within the subject discipline.

Under the broad umbrella of literacy this chapter examines concepts such as critical literacy, multiple literacies, and literacy standards. There are also separate sections on the use of differentiated texts and instruction in classrooms, using questions that promote higher-order thinking skills, and promoting technological competencies among both students and teachers. Online, there are essays on using multicultural literature to challenge student understanding of the world and an essay that defines technological literacy and its importance in education and life.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—LOOKING BACKWARD

A number of authors have written books in which they try, usually without success, to predict the future. In *Looking Backward*, first published in 1888, Edward Bellamy described the world in the year 2000. It would be a place without war, greed, hypocrisy, and apathy, and people would no longer struggle to survive. If only he were right!

Part of the problem with predicting the future is that in recent decades technology has changed so rapidly and in unanticipated directions. I was born in 1950—before CDs, DVDs, transistor radios, flat screen hi-definition television, and of course, personal computers.

Questions to Consider:

1. How has technology changed the world since you first entered school?
2. How were you able to adapt to these changes?
3. In your opinion, how can teachers prepare students for a rapidly changing world when we do not know which direction it will take?

Section A: What Is Critical Literacy?

In this section I will revisit some of the issues discussed in [Chapter 3](#) when we examined the national Common Core Standards. When most teachers, parents, and non-specialists think about literacy, we think of proficiency in reading, writing, and arithmetic—the classic 3 Rs traditionally taught through repetitive practice. This view of literacy, as skills to be acquired through constant practice, is supported by some advocates for Common Core as well as by advertisements selling online tutorial programs that supposedly boost student reading scores. Many of you may remember going to schools where a major activity was reciting spelling lists or the multiplication tables.

Linda Christensen, a high school English teacher whom we met in [Chapter 6](#), has a significantly different view. In *Reading, Writing and Rising Up* (2000), a collection of writings by herself and her students, Christensen discusses literacy as part of community building in the classroom and the struggle for social justice in the broader society. Christensen introduces her students to the power of language as a form of creative expression that allows them to discover themselves and share with others. But it is also vital for shaping, critiquing, and communicating ideas, and it empowers them, as global citizens, to influence and reshape the world.

In Christensen's classroom, literacy means expression, communication, and social transformation. Her vision of literacy reminds me of a labor union song from the 1913 textile workers' strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. As young women marched in protest against low wages, long hours, and unfair working conditions, they demanded “bread and roses”—higher pay and decent living conditions (bread) and an opportunity to experience the joy and beauty of life (roses). In Christensen's classrooms, students read, write, and speak for both “bread and roses.”

Paulo Freire, whose philosophy of education was introduced in [Chapter 1](#), argues that literacy should not be viewed as a technical skill, but as a necessary action for freedom (Freire & Macedo, 1987). According to Freire, critical literacy requires reading and understanding both the world and the word so that people have the ability to use words to change the world. He feels that interest in and the ability to “read the world” naturally precedes the ability to “read the word.” Based on his perspective, in order to enhance traditional “pen-and-paper” literacy, teachers must engage students as activists.

As a high school social studies teacher committed to promoting this kind of critical literacy, I helped students in my government classes organize a club to encourage student political activism. The club sponsored speakers on controversial topics such as abortion rights and apartheid, lobbied government agencies for increased school funding, and participated in political rallies. As these students read the world, they were forced by the momentum of their actions to improve their ability to read the word. Members researched issues and wrote reports, speeches, press releases, leaflets, and opinion essays for newspapers. They created posters, buttons, political cartoons, charts, and graphs, and they edited video reports on their activities.

A similar approach to teaching and literacy has found a powerful advocate in Robert Moses, a mathematics teacher who is also a civil rights activist. According to Moses (1994), “The main goal of the Algebra Project is to impact the struggle for citizenship and equality by assisting students in inner city and rural areas to achieve mathematics literacy. Higher order thinking and problem solving skills are necessary for entry into the

economic mainstream Without these skills children will be tracked into an economic underclass.”

The Algebra Project (Moses & Cobb, 2001), introduced in [Chapter 3](#), helps students build an understanding of mathematical concepts through a five-step process that moves them from familiar concrete experiences (reading the world) to abstract mathematics (reading the word).

1. Students participate in a physical experience, such as a trip, in which they see examples of what they are studying (e.g., arches, geometric shapes, suspension bridges).
2. Following the trip, students draw pictorial representations or construct models of what they have observed.
3. Next, they discuss and write about the event in their everyday dialect or intuitive language. Moses calls this stage “People Talk.”
4. Their oral and written reports are then translated into the standard dialect or structured language as part of “Feature Talk.”
5. In the last step, students develop symbolic or algebraic representations that describe what they have learned. They present these representations in class and explore how they can be used to describe other phenomena.

What I especially like about Moses' work is that he extends critical literacy from social studies and English into the mathematics classroom. His ideas on empowering students through a structured learning process that uses their lived experience and home dialects to engage them in learning complex material is applicable in language acquisition, science, or any other area of academic study.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—DECIPHERING OR READING?

When I was a pre-teenager, I learned to pray in Hebrew in preparation for my bar mitzvah at age 13. A bar mitzvah is a ceremony in which a Jewish adolescent is accepted as an adult member of the religious community. My friends and I used to joke that we had to pray in Hebrew because “God does not understand English.” Of course we did not understand Hebrew. We simply deciphered meaningless sounds and recited them aloud. Later, as an adult, I learned that many Roman Catholic youth had a similar experience studying Latin.

I have been in many classrooms where students decipher and recite text the same way. When questioned, they have no idea what they have just read. The students possess technical skill, but they are not reading, which, according to Freire, “always involves critical perception, interpretation, and rewriting of what is read.”

Questions to Consider:

1. How did you learn to make meaning of what you read?
2. What motivated you to grapple with difficult text?
3. Do you agree with the idea of critical literacy? Explain.

Section B: How Many Kinds of Literacy Are There?

This broader notion of critical literacy advocated by Freire, Christensen, and Moses is closer to the ideas of contemporary literacy specialists than is the older version of simply mastering the three Rs. Because they view literacy as fundamental to the processes of thinking, understanding, and acting, literacy specialists are the imperialists of the educational world (see online E17). For them, everything is a form of literacy and there are numerous overlapping and interwoven varieties. One book, published by the International Reading Association (IRA), listed 38 types, including academic literacy, community literacy, critical literacy, cultural literacy, media literacy, pragmatic literacy, and workplace literacy (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Let me use an example from the world of sports to illustrate my understanding of what literacy specialists mean by literacy. One of the most difficult positions to master in any team sport is the football quarterback. Not only must a player have the requisite physical skills, but a quarterback must also be able to read and respond to a series of defensive strategies employed by the other team and to quickly communicate new plans to teammates. Quarterbacks are assisted in doing this by viewing videotape of earlier games, studying charts of opposition tendencies, reviewing their own team's playbook, and running countless simulations during practice sessions. In addition, they continually receive new information via radio, by signals from coaches scattered around the field, and orally from teammates when they huddle before a play. Each of these activities involves a different form of literacy because the quarterback is continuously gathering, evaluating, and communicating information. But in addition, the quarterback is engrossed in a cultural context, the game of football, with its own goals and rules, goals and rules that it took years to master. Football requires its own areas of competence or literacy in order to engage in the conversation (or play the game).

An appreciation of context is crucial for understanding this modern concept of literacy. A word means different things in different contexts. For example, if a teacher said that a middle school student's report was "bad," the student who received this evaluation would probably get upset. But if a fellow student declared that the same report was "B-A-D," it would be cause for celebration. The word "bad" clearly means different things in these different cultural contexts. As noted earlier, even the word "literacy" means one thing in standard usage and something very different to educational theorists.

Some educators are trying to reconcile traditional and contemporary ideas about literacy. A theme issue of the highly regarded magazine *Educational Leadership* argued that teachers and school policymakers needed to promote "learning the basics of reading and writing, grammar and spelling" as well as the ability of students to participate in conversations in different arenas and use information garnered from diverse sources (Tell, 1999, p. 5).

Articles in this theme issue discussed programs for improving student performance in reading and writing, and the importance of mastering specialized literacies, including numeracy, science literacy, arts literacy, media literacy, information literacy, and technology literacy. Numeracy, or quantitative literacy, involves the ability to comfortably use basic arithmetic skills, but also includes competency with complex statistical, computer, interpretive, and technical communication skills. A person with numerical literacy must understand as well as calculate; she or he must be able to draw inferences from numbers and use them to make judgments. Science literacy requires knowledge of scientific facts, concepts, and theories and an understanding of the

scientific approach to evaluating hypotheses using reason and experimentation. Information literacy, media literacy, and technology literacy, although they start from a different focus, are clearly intertwined, involving students in acquiring and evaluating sources of information. Similarly, art literacy shares much in common with music and literature.

So, how many literacies are there? By some definitions, there is at least one for each area of study and academic skill. However, I think it is more useful to limit ourselves to two general categories of literacy: critical literacy (which involves thinking, understanding, and acting on the world) and multiple literacies (which include finding, processing, and using information from different media and fields of study).

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—DO YOU SPEAK MATH?

Before looking at the questions that follow, carefully observe the room around you. Then write a paragraph describing the room.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are the key descriptors you used in the paragraph to describe the room?
2. Compare your description with those written by other students. Do you use the same kind of descriptors?
3. In my teacher education classes, I find that some students use numbers and focus on quantities and measurements in their descriptions. Other students write about colors and shapes or about how the room makes them feel. In your opinion, why do people take such different approaches?
4. I find it helpful to think of mathematics as a language that allows for precise descriptions of quantities and certain relationships, but is not as useful as other languages for poetic or metaphoric representation. In your opinion, is it useful to think of mathematics as a language? Explain.

Section C: What Are Literacy Standards?

A number of national organizations have adopted lists of standards (goals) designed to help teachers and schools develop strategies promoting student literacy. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) offer a joint list that includes 12 interrelated educational goals (n.d.). Teachers from different academic disciplines are rarely familiar with standards from other subject areas. However, given our shared mission of enhancing student literacies and the demands of Common Core, it is important that all teachers be familiar with these language arts literacy standards.

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and to achieve personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

In [Chapter 3](#), I emphasized that standards should be seen as goals, rather than as a measuring rod of performance. I think the NCTE-IRA literacy standards underscore that point. I also think they help us define what we mean by a literate or educated person. Based on these 12 standards, a literate person is someone who is able to use print and nonprint resources to acquire information and conduct independent research, to communicate effectively with a range of audiences using different media, with the ability and background to understand the diverse dimensions of human experience, and to actively and thoughtfully participate in broader communities.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—LITERACY STANDARDS

Questions to Consider:

1. Which of these literacy standards is applicable in your academic subject area? Explain.
2. Discuss three lesson ideas in your subject area that would promote student literacies.
3. How do you define a literate or educated person? Would you consider yourself a member of this group based on your definition? Why?

Section D: How Can Students Learn Complex Material While Still Struggling to Improve Their Reading Skills?

Maureen Murphy and I (MacCurtain et al., 2001) conducted a multiyear project developing inter-disciplinary activities, lessons, and units for teaching about the Great Irish Famine in grades 4–12. Our initial plan was to prepare separate high school (9–12) and upper elementary/middle-level (4–8) packages. High school materials would be minimally edited, whereas the middle-level package would include documents that were adapted for classroom use.

Through field testing the lessons in classrooms, participation in and observation of group work, and follow-up discussions with students, we discovered that our distinction between the two levels did not take into account the full range of student performance. Many high school students were more comfortable with the adapted documents, whereas some middle-level students were capable of reading with understanding the minimally edited text. In addition, in both middle and high school classes, some students with a record of poor academic performance could not read either set of materials. Teachers working with these students recommended that documents be completely rewritten. As a result of this input, the final curriculum guide offers teachers the option of using differentiated edited, adapted, and rewritten text with major language revisions, either with an entire class on any grade level or with selected students.

While field testing the curriculum, we also learned that the way material was presented to students was fundamental for capturing their interest and promoting learning. When teachers engaged students in activities, used references that had meaning to a particular group of students, reviewed vocabulary and provided a context for language, provided readings that were accessible, and encouraged freewheeling discussions, every group of students responded enthusiastically to the curriculum. Inner-city and suburban students, immigrants and native-born, and students from different ethnic backgrounds were all fascinated by events before, during, and after the Great Irish Famine.

Some of our most successful lessons about the Irish were taught in low-performing inner-city middle schools, with students who were largely African American, Caribbean, and Latino. The keys to these lessons were our ability to create a context for literacy and learning, as well as to provide students with differentiated text. Students sang traditional songs such as “Paddy on the Railway” and “No Irish Need Apply,” examined political cartoons and newspaper illustrations downloaded from the Internet, and compared the experience of the Irish with their own experiences of discrimination and inequality. Our experience in these classes is consistent with Maxine Greene's idea that learning is a search for “situated understanding” that places ideas and events in their social, historical, and cultural contexts.

I sometimes compare learning to read with weightlifting. If your goal is to bench press 200 pounds, you start with a lower weight and build up your skill and muscle over time. If you were given a bar with 200 pounds on the first day and told to lift, you would probably just give up. Using differentiated texts offers teachers a strategy for maintaining student interest while helping them gradually reach a higher standard.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—DEOXYRIBOSE NUCLEIC ACID

Our work on the Great Irish Famine curriculum guide points up the crucial importance of accessible text and appropriate context when teachers present complex material to students who are struggling to improve their literacy skills. These are not only concerns for social studies

and English teachers. Below you will find three versions of the same passage from an article published in *Nature* magazine in 1953 explaining the molecular structure of DNA. The first version is slightly edited from the original. The second version has been adapted and the third version is completely rewritten.

Questions to Consider:

1. Read the first version and write a paragraph explaining what it means.
2. How did you feel as you read this version of the article? Why?
3. After reading all three versions, explain which version you think should be used in a high school biology class? Why?
4. In your view, how can differentiated text be used to promote student understanding of complex material while literacy skills are still developing?

A) “A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid” (Edited Version) by J.D. Watson and F. H. C. Crick (1953). *Nature*, 171, 737.

We wish to suggest a structure for the salt of deoxyribose nucleic acid (D.N.A.). This structure has novel features which are of considerable biological interest

This structure has two helical chains each coiled round the same axis. We have made the usual chemical assumptions, namely, that each chain consists of phosphate diester groups joining (D-deoxyribofuranose residues with 3', 5' linkages. The two chains (but not their bases) are related by a dyad perpendicular to the fibre axis. Both chains follow right-handed helices, but owing to the dyad the sequences of the atoms in the two chains run in opposite directions. Each chain loosely resembles Furberg's model no. 1; that is, the bases are on the inside of the helix and the phosphates on the outside. The configuration of the sugar and the atoms near it is close to Furberg's "standard configuration," the sugar being roughly perpendicular to the attached base. There is a residue on each every 3.4 Å. in the z-direction. We have assumed an angle of 36° between adjacent residues in the same chain, so that the structure repeats after 10 residues on each chain, that is, after 34 Å. The distance of a phosphorus atom from the fibre axis is 10 Å. As the phosphates are on the outside, cations have easy access to them. The structure is an open one, and its water content is rather high. At lower water contents we would expect the bases to tilt so that the structure could become more compact.

The novel feature of the structure is the manner in which the two chains are held together by the purine and pyrimidine bases. The planes of the bases are perpendicular to the fibre axis. They are joined together in pairs, a single base from the other chain, so that the two lie side by side with identical z-coordinates. One of the pair must be a purine and the other pyrimidine for bonding to occur. The hydrogen bonds are made as follows: purine position 1 to pyrimidine position 1; purine position 6 to pyrimidine position 6

It is probably impossible to build this structure with a ribose sugar in place of the deoxyribose, as the extra oxygen atom would make too close a van der Waals contact. The previously published X-ray data on deoxyribose nucleic acid are insufficient for a rigorous test of our structure. So far as we can tell, it is roughly compatible with the experimental data, but it must be regarded as unproved until it has been checked against more exact results. Some of these are given in the following communications. We were not aware of the details of the results presented there when we devised our structure, which rests mainly though not entirely on published experimental data and stereochemical arguments.

It has not escaped our notice that the specific pairing we have postulated immediately suggests a possible copying mechanism for the genetic material.

Full details of the structure, ... together with a set of coordinates for the atoms, will be published elsewhere.

B) “Molecular Structure of D.N.A.” (Adapted Version) by J.D. Watson and F.H.C. Crick. (1953). *Nature*, 171, 737.

We wish to suggest a structure for ... D.N.A. This structure has novel features of considerable biological interest.

We wish to put forward a radically different structure for D.N.A. This structure has two helical chains each coiled round the same axis. We have made the usual chemical assumptions The novel feature of the structure is the manner in which the two chains are held together.

The previously published X-ray data on D.N.A. are insufficient for a rigorous test of our structure. So far as we can tell, it is roughly compatible with the experimental data, but it must be regarded as unproved until it has been checked against more exact results.

It has not escaped our notice that the specific pairing we have postulated immediately suggests a possible copying mechanism for the genetic materials.

Full details of the structure, including the conditions assumed in building it, together with a set of coordinates for the atoms, will be published elsewhere.

C) Scientists Solve a Mystery (Rewritten Version)

Do you look like your parents? Do you know why?

For many years scientists tried to understand how living things create new living things that look a lot like them. We call this process reproduction. Tall parents usually have children who grow tall. Dark-skinned parents generally have dark-skinned children. If parents have big feet, their children probably also will have big feet when they become adults.

Some scientists believed that the key to reproduction was a molecule they called D.N.A. The problem was that the D.N.A. molecule is so small that the scientists did not know what it looked like. The shape of D.N.A. was a real scientific mystery.

Teams of scientists guessed different shapes for D.N.A. They tried to fit different chemicals into a complicated puzzle. Finally scientists named Watson and Crick drew the picture shown above. The beauty of their picture was that it used all the chemical pieces and it showed how D.N.A. could reproduce by splitting. When scientists did more tests, it turned out that Watson and Crick were right. They had solved the mystery of D.N.A.

Section E: How Can Classroom Practice Promote Student Literacies?

I have already called literacy specialists the imperialists of the educational world. But they are not the first to claim this title. When I was taking teacher education classes as an undergraduate college student, instead of developing student literacies, teachers were expected to promote critical thinking skills using higher-order questions. The core of this approach to teaching was Bloom's taxonomy (explained further in the Join the Discussion box at the end of this section), a system that classifies questions based on whether they encourage critical thinking by students. The lowest level of questions ask students to recall information, whereas the highest level requires them to exercise judgment. Bloom's system is useful to teachers because it emphasizes that students should be learning to use information to formulate and support their ideas.

A problem with broadly defined literacy standards is that it is often difficult for new teachers to imagine what they look like in ordinary classroom practice. We can always include reading and writing activities in lesson plans, but by themselves this is not enough for students to achieve the level of literacy that is required in our society.

A crucial part of a teacher's literacy arsenal is her or his ability to develop and ask effective higher-order questions that capture the interest of students, stimulate discussions, and challenge students to examine and understand complicated text and ideas. When I design an activity sheet for a lesson, every reading passage, illustration, or chart is followed by three or four questions that scaffold on each other and require increasingly complex answers. The first question asks students to find or describe a piece of information; the second question is more interpretative; and the final question(s) asks students to draw a conclusion, explain a new understanding, or make a judgment based on information they have learned. For example, an activity sheet with the edited passage on the "Molecular Structure of D.N.A." (from [section D](#)) would include the following questions:

1. What are the authors describing in this passage?
2. Why do they believe they offer a better model?
3. What do we learn about the scientific method from this paper?
4. In your opinion, why is their discovery a significant scientific achievement?

A middle school social studies lesson on the American Revolution might start with a picture of Washington crossing the Delaware River downloaded from the Internet, with the following more or less generic questions.

1. What scene is depicted in this picture?
2. What information does this picture tell us about the "historical" period?
3. In your opinion, why is this happening?
4. Based on information in this picture and your other knowledge of the period, what proposals would you make to address this problem? Why?

Later in class, as we go over the passage or the picture, I would ask students to discuss their answers to the questions. Whatever their responses, I would follow up with one of three new questions: What evidence do you have for your answer? What do you think of responses by other students? And the most important

question of all higher-order thinking questions: WHY?

Using questions to promote critical literacy is also a major component of Grant Wiggins's approach to teaching methods, which he calls "Understanding by Design" (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Wiggins argues that teachers should present students with "essential questions" without simple answers, which are reintroduced over and over throughout the curriculum. For social studies, he suggest questions such as: "Is there enough to go around (e.g., food, clothes, water)?" "Is history a story of progress?" "When is law unjust?" "Who owns what and why?" A language arts class could explore questions such as: "Must a story have a moral?" "What qualities make someone a hero (or villain)?" "Do we always mean what we say and say what we mean?" A biology curriculum could be organized to answer the question: "How does an organism's structure enable it to survive in its environment?" or "Is biology destiny?"

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

Benjamin Bloom's classification system organizes questions into six categories based on the "level of thought" required from students. They are ranked here from lower-level to higher-level thinking (<http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html>).

Knowledge: Students are asked to recall or describe information that they have been provided in an assignment or by the teacher.

Comprehension: Students are asked to interpret or explain information. **Application:** Students use information to explain other related events, solve a problem, or speculate about broader causes or issues.

Analysis: Students use information to draw conclusions.

Synthesis: Students use information to arrive at a new understanding.

Evaluation: Students use information and established criteria to make a judgment or support an opinion.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you think teachers should think of questions in advance and include them in their lesson plans? Explain.
2. Do you agree with Bloom's idea of a hierarchy of questions? Explain.
3. Design three to five high-order analysis, synthesis, or evaluation questions in your subject area.
4. In your opinion, can higher-order thinking questions be used to enhance critical literacy? Explain.

Section F: Technological Literacy in a Digital Age

In the first edition of *Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach*, I included a very limited section on technological literacy for teachers and secondary school students, and an essay by a colleague that defined technology very broadly. Gary Benenson, a professor of technology education at the City College of New York titled the section, now included online (E18), as “Technology Is All Around You.” In Gary’s view, students need to understand how to use technology as tools for solving problems. His point remains important, because in too many classrooms technology is used to entertain rather than to support critical thinking.

When I wrote the first edition of this book between 1998 and 2002 I was already an avid user of email, but had not learned about PowerPoint presentations, interactive programs, or how to maintain a website. I used to tell teacher education students that just because they had to be familiar with the latest technological innovations, it did not mean I had to be. During the past decade I have continued to drag my feet, but I think I have progressed a little into the twenty-first century as I try to think about the use of technology in the classroom from two different perspectives—the perspective of the teacher and the perspective of the student.

I am not sure that I am so unique. It is not easy for teachers, even those who are willing and interested, to learn or teach about technology in a universe where technology is continually changing. Before my youngest child grew up and moved out, I learned most of what I know about computers by looking over his shoulder. I eventually realized I could adapt that strategy to learn from my students, both in high school and teacher education classes, as they become technology experts and teachers in my classes.

To teach technology in the content area, I recommend meeting regularly with an expert group of students who can help you figure out what needs to be done, are able to master the appropriate skills, and then work within their own cooperative learning teams to ensure that all students in the class develop necessary competencies. It is the best way I know to keep up with the students.

Technological literacy has broad implications in all secondary school content areas, and it is useful to examine the standards developed by national educational organizations. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) recommends the following “NETS for Students.” Their National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) are the standards for learning, teaching, and leading in the digital age and have been widely recognized and adopted worldwide. I think it is telling that the first of the NETS focuses on creativity, innovation, and critical thinking rather than technical competence, which is the last of the six standards (ISTE, n.d.).

National Educational Technology Standards for Students (NETS)

1. **Creativity and Innovation**—Students demonstrate creative thinking, construct knowledge, and develop innovative products and processes using technology.
 - a. Apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes
 - b. Create original works as a means of personal or group expression
 - c. Use models and simulations to explore complex systems and issues
 - d. Identify trends and forecast possibilities

2. **Communication and Collaboration**—Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others.
 - a. Interact, collaborate, and publish with peers, experts, or others employing a variety of digital environments and media
 - b. Communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats
 - c. Develop cultural understanding and global awareness by engaging with learners of other cultures
 - d. Contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems
3. **Research and Information Fluency**—Students apply digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information.
 - a. Plan strategies to guide inquiry
 - b. Locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media
 - c. Evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on the appropriateness to specific tasks
 - d. Process data and report results
4. **Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making**—Students use critical thinking skills to plan and conduct research, manage projects, solve problems, and make informed decisions using appropriate digital tools and resources.
 - a. Identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation
 - b. Plan and manage activities to develop a solution or complete a project
 - c. Collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions
 - d. Use multiple processes and diverse perspectives to explore alternative solutions
5. **Digital Citizenship**—Students understand human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology, and practice legal and ethical behavior.
 - a. Advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
 - b. Exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity
 - c. Demonstrate personal responsibility for lifelong learning
 - d. Exhibit leadership for digital citizenship
6. **Technology Operations and Concepts**— Students demonstrate a sound understanding of technology concepts, systems, and operations.

- a. Understand and use technology systems
- b. Select and use applications effectively and productively
- c. Troubleshoot systems and applications
- d. Transfer current knowledge to learning of new technologies

Section G: A Dialogue Between Techno-Geek Teachers and an Aging Technosaurus

Dialogues between true believers and skeptics were a major literary device in the past. Plato wrote a series of imagined dialogues between his mentor, the philosopher and probing questioner Socrates, and an assortment of know-it-all characters hanging around the Acropolis in downtown ancient Athens. During the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European Enlightenment, Galileo, Bishop Berkley, and David Hume set up mock-debates to examine whether the Earth revolved around the Sun or vice versa, whether you could actually prove physical existence outside of the mind, and whether religion was based on logic and the facts of nature or had to be accepted on faith alone.

I have always been a bit of a skeptic about the value of technology in the classroom, I call myself a “technosaurus” or technical dinosaur, although a number of the best teachers I work with rank as advanced techno-geeks. Instead of writing about something I am not that conversant with or committed to, I felt it made more sense to organize this section as a dialogue between the techno-geek teachers and the technosaurus. One warning, however, based on the rate of technological change during the last 10 years, all of this might be obsolete before you read it. Let us hope teachers do not become obsolete as well.

By the way, the technosaurus was actually a real dinosaur. It was about three feet long, weighed in at 20 pounds, and lived over 200 million years ago. Its remains were discovered near Texas Tech University, hence its name. The university is lobbying to have the technosaurus declared the official dinosaur of the State of Texas.

Characters in the Dialogue:

An Aging Technosaurus: Alan Singer

Techno-Geek Teachers: Middle school teachers Dean Bacigalupo, Rich Tauber, and Rachel Thompson;
Roberto Joseph, teacher educator and former high school teacher.

Technosaurus: What should all new teachers know about the availability of technology in the classroom and its use in instruction?

Rachel: Schools vary so widely in the amount and type of technology available to teachers and students that it is difficult to give a blanket statement about technology usage. Even in schools where there is little technology available, teachers can expose students to practical and, most importantly, real use. If a teacher has a computer available with web access, he or she can incorporate the Internet into lessons. When questions are raised during class discussions, send a student to the computer to go online, research possible answers, and report back to the class. The five or ten minutes of work the student misses are worth the research practice. If a teacher has access to a computer and projector, organize a presentation to teach students Internet research skills such as effectively using search engines and evaluating Wikipedia and other sources of information. Think of the lesson as an investment that will improve student performance throughout the year.

In schools with Smart Boards and other available technologies, different challenges exist. A techno-shy teacher may be hesitant to use the technology, fearing they will make errors, lose control over the class, break the equipment, waste time due to glitches or, the constant dread, not finish the curriculum. My advice is “Just Do It.” In schools where technologies are available, rough patches are expected. An administrator, another

teacher, or a tech-savvy student can be called on for help. Students can help set up a projector, find a mysteriously missing file, or open lost programs. I recommend having lower-tracked classes work with technology even more than the higher-tracked ones. Generally, higher performing students use computers with other teachers or at home. It is students who never get a chance to use technology somewhere else that I feel especially need my attention.

Dean: Like my friend the aging Technosaurus I was and to some degree still am a skeptic when it came to integrating technology into instruction. My classroom was engaging and my students were excelling without all the programs vendors are selling that promise improved results. Why change what is not broken?

I began teaching in the late 1990s, when many school districts were given computers through grants and teachers were required to develop units incorporating the new technology. I received four iMac computers and software to use with classes of over 30 students. Not only was it impossible to schedule computer time for all of the students, but the software was awful and we did not have Internet access.

Students took turns on the computers playing games and simulations. I am not sure what they were supposed to learn as they shot buffalo, but they appeared to be entertained. Instead of a teaching tool, the computers quickly became a classroom reward for good behavior and work habits.

The following year a printer was added to our technology package and this proved to be very useful to promote language development, writing skills, and critical thinking. I had students write, revise, and publish for different audiences. The computers did not replace good reading and writing instruction, but they were a useful resource available to help engage students. A word of warning: Do not get sucked into the entertainment value of the technology. We are teachers, not entertainers. If I wanted to entertain I would have gone to acting school.

There are many things to consider, some of them surprising, as your classroom and instruction becomes more oriented to new technologies. It is a mistake to assume prior student knowledge or computer competency. Students must understand how to use a Smart Board before they can interact with it. In addition your classroom will be set up differently when you are using laptops or iPads, and procedures for accessing and caring for these devices must be clear. You also need to ensure that these devices are secure when you are not in the classroom. Sometimes you will feel like the security guard for the computers.

Technosaurus: How can teachers use technology to support student learning?

Rachel: Very simply, technology best supports student learning when it mimics real-world use. Contrived activities that claim to be interactive, such as when students answer multiple-choice questions on the computer, are pretty worthless. I like the idea of having student researchers look up answers to questions that come up in class. Access to the Internet means access to a vast library of knowledge and information that is only useful to those who know how to find the information and assess it. “Real world” means having control over technology instead of thinking of the computer as a magic wand.

Roberto: As a math teacher, one of my favorite activities was graphically solving equations. Each time I wanted to create a graph on the board I would pull down a shade with rows of tiny holes and vigorously rub an eraser over the shade. When the shade was rolled back up I had a coordinate grid that my students and I

could use to graph lines and solve equations. This process was messy, hard to read, and it took time away from solving problems. Today, interactive whiteboards come with a coordinate grid template that permits students to solve problems graphically without wasting class time to set up the problem. Similarly, in a social studies class teachers can instantly pull up maps from different parts of the world and have students come up to interact with the board. You can embed Youtube videos into the lesson. All of this can be done in advance when planning a lesson. Creating an interactive whiteboard lesson is not very different from creating a PowerPoint; it just requires you to think about creating interactive activities that get students out of their seats and manipulating objects.

Dean: The greatest change involving technology in my classroom was the shift from chalkboard to an interactive whiteboard, commonly called a Smart Board, named after the software that allows interaction between the whiteboard and a computer. Anything you can do on a computer screen you can project on the whiteboard, and anything you can do with the computer's mouse you are able to do with the touch of your finger on the interactive whiteboard. I even have an iPad linked to my Smart Board so I can walk around the room or sit with a group of students and while changing what is presented on the Smart Board.

With the computer—Smart Board connection, I incorporate high-quality images of art and architecture, listen to or watch clips of famous speeches, events, people, and music. I can annotate primary source or secondary source documents or have students come up and do it for us. I have taken classes on virtual field trips, gone back in time, and walked through ancient cities using Google Earth. To support student learning and language development, I have students use a variety of software for presentations or to publish in a variety of ways. Some projects utilizing technology include essays, PowerPoint, blogs, mock social networking pages, student-created children's books, YouTube videos, and Internet collages. Students can be in touch with classrooms all over the world using Skype or email, and question experts about topics they are studying.

Rich: All good instruction is measured by student learning. There is a video called “Did you Know? Shift Happen” (<http://shifthappens.wikispaces.com/>) that promotes a dialogue about the changing world we live in and the role education can play. The gist of the video is that we need to provide instruction that prepares students for the global market and the fast-changing world. Students who are critical thinkers will be better equipped to adjust to change. This is where educational technology is vital. As teachers, we must utilize new technologies to support an environment where critical thinking takes place. I am a big advocate of what is now called Web 2.0, the second generation of the Internet, because it allows users to create, collaborate, and share information online. Social networking, blogs, wikis, and videos are all components of Web 2.0.

My middle school classes create wikis, Internet sites that allow collaboration and instant feedback (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dnL00TdmLY>), and Animoto videos, an online application that allows you to produce videos (<http://animoto.com/education>). My ELA colleagues create literary blogs with their classes. History teachers have students create Facebook pages for historical figures. I have students post homework through email or an e-chalk portal. All of these ideas promote student involvement in creating their own knowledge as well as access to teachers and other students.

Technosaurus: How can teachers use technology to support their own development?

Roberto: As a teacher, you have to continually keep up to date with your subject area and the latest trends that surround your subject. With budget cuts that have affected many school districts, teachers are not able to attend regional/national conferences for networking and professional development. Teachers are also expected to subscribe to and read journals in their subject area. I would hope that my child's teacher keeps up on the latest research, development, and strategies in teaching and learning in his/her subject. Many tech-savvy districts are encouraging their teachers to create Twitter accounts that allow them to join Professional Learning Networks (PLN). For example, if you have a Twitter account, once you login you can search for "hashtags," which are keywords that Twitter users use to group and organize their Tweets (140 character messages). So I write the following tweet message:

Emancipation and Slavery http://www.buffingtonpost.com/alan-singer/preliminary-emancipation-proclamation-exhibition_b_1884272.html#HofstraSED

Anyone in the world who then searches on Twitter for "HofstraSED" will see this message. Also, anyone who includes "#HofstraSED" in their tweets will add their message to the list. Using hashtags is a great way to keep up to date with any field or topic. You can post questions and responses via tweets and hashtags as well. PLNs are not bounded by school walls; you can tweet with educators from all over the world.

Technosaurus: What are the dangers of overdependence on technology in the classroom?

Rich: Teachers have to invest time in surveying the available technology (iPads, e-readers, Internet, laptops, desktops, Smart Boards, etc.) and exploring the challenges and possibilities new technologies brings to the classroom. I ask the question, "How can this technology help me deliver instruction and support student learning?" The integration of technology and good instruction does not always go hand in hand. I witnessed lessons where the teacher created colorful, information-filled PowerPoints only to produce an environment in which the teacher is talking at a group of unengaged learners. Teachers always have to be prepared for when technology fails. I learned the hard way to always have a backup plan because you never know. In addition, when you rely too much on anything, including technology, instruction can become monotonous.

Roberto: It is always important to have a backup plan... many times I've had a great lesson prepared that integrates the use of technology only for some aspect of that technology to be unavailable at class time... i.e. the Internet is down, or the computer or overhead projection system is not working. Many teachers also rely on presenting information to students without allowing students to play with or engage with the information. Students should be writing with pencils/pens, solving math problems with paper/pencils. Technology should only be used for tasks that are more difficult or impossible to do without it.

Rachel: I agree with Roberto and Rich. Be prepared for the technology to break. Never become so dependent on any tool that you cannot function without it. Always have something to fall back on if the Internet is down or the power goes out. This does not mean I create two lessons for every class, one tech-based and one paper-based. In fact, not every one of my lessons requires technology. I do use PowerPoints often to project my lesson but I always print them. I also keep a set of readings or printed handouts that are relevant to the unit just in case.

Dean: This may sound strange, but the biggest danger in the overuse of classroom technology is

convenience. A basic Internet search will lead to an array of lessons on any topic. Textbook publishers are quick to market PowerPoint and other types of “ready to use” lessons and units. Unfortunately, some new teachers are replacing well-thought-out lessons that meet the individual needs of their students with these pre-packaged ideas. And of course, I have found these prepackaged lessons do little to foster student learning in the classroom. I think any new technology should be used as another resource available to engage students in learning, and needs to be carefully considered throughout the development of any lesson plan. New technology is introduced into classrooms quicker than even the most tech-savvy teachers can master it. The key to effective instruction is not the technology, but remembering we must focus on the way students use language to create meaning, make connections, and learn. Whether they learned from paintings on cave walls, written words on paper, or by typing into a computer, students' ability to understand language and communicate it with clarity is essential if they are to become lifelong learners and critical thinkers.

Technosaurus: Is there any technology that teachers should avoid?

Roberto: Avoid programs that distract students from learning. You also have to remember that access to some websites may be blocked by your school district.

Rich: Be careful with social networking. It can open the door to problems such as inappropriate student-to-student or student-to-teacher interaction. When creating a class wiki or blog, you need to maintain total administrative control.

Rachel: Stay away from personal contacts with kids online either in email or on Facebook and Twitter. You can set up professional accounts to use if your school district allows them. I see no need for a student to be on my Facebook friends list, but I do see that there could be great value in using Smartphones as part of the classroom. I would text a homework assignment or relevant photos to students from my work email but NEVER my personal cell phone.

Technosaurus: How can students use technology to increase their productivity?

Roberto: All students should be able to type! I know this sounds simple but it is critical that students learn to type at an early age... if not it slows down the writing process. All students should be able to organize their schedules and class notes... I think you need to be able to do this on paper and electronically. All students should know how to conduct simple research for books and articles. Google and Wikipedia are good starting points, but students should also be knowledgeable of how to use subject-specific databases.

Technosaurus: How can students use technology to learn new subject matter?

Roberto: What technology you use with students should depend on what you are trying to teach and the level of thinking. If you want students to memorize facts, there are some great technological tools to help students. Much of the educational software developed in the 1990s helped students to memorize rote information. This is called Drill-n-Practice type of software. If we want students to learn a concept for understanding and we want to see if they understand that concept, we can use concept-mapping software to ask students to organize their understanding about a concept. But if we want students to be creative, instead of having them play a game about how civilizations have evolved, we can now have them design a game about various civilizations.

This is an area of research that I am very interested in. Slowly we are moving into an age in education where students are not only playing educational games, but are now also creating them... which requires a higher level of thinking about a topic at its macro and micro level. iPads and other tablet devices are also making their way into classrooms, and students will now be able to design educational apps for these devices as well.

Technosaurus: How does technology help students and teachers acquire, organize, and evaluate information?

Dean: The Internet opens a whole world of information in seconds. With the current generation of iPhones and similar devices, students can literally locate information on any topic anywhere. What they do with this information is important to consider when planning lessons. I have incorporated more lessons on analyzing the reliability of sources, locating information using databases vs. a Google search, author bias, and recognizing the use and effectiveness of propaganda techniques, to name a few. Again, language is the building block of learning and critical thinking so students must be taught how an author's use of language creates meaning in multiple contexts opened by the Internet and other new technologies.

Rich: With online technology, finding information is no longer a daunting task. The Internet has literally put information at our fingertips. Search engines lead us to endless amounts of data. The task of teachers and students must shift from an emphasis on data collection to data evaluation. How do we know if the information is credible? Organizing and presenting information has always been a critical skill. Microsoft Office has many programs that help students and teachers organize and present information. One website I teach students to use to organize information is Museum Box (<http://museumbox.e2bn.org/>), where they place different types of materials in a virtual box.

Rachel: I see it differently. Technology does not help students and teachers acquire information. Students and teachers help themselves acquire information by knowing how to search effectively, validate sources, interpret information, and then share what they learned with others as a way to open up a dialogue of new ideas. These are not skills specific to digital technology; we use them when we read the paper, watch television, or even just talk to others. Students do not realize that they cannot believe everything they see or hear and that they have to be critical consumers and producers of information. Students do it in their everyday lives when they watch television and listen to music. They are very eager to express their opinions and critique the newest bands. They need to transfer that skill to an academic setting. A number of websites intentionally set up with false information to be used as a learning tool, or created by people who are severely biased or armed with misinformation, can be used to help teach students how to do this. Alan November has a great information resources site that can walk teachers through designing lessons for students on this topic (<http://novemberlearning.com/resources/>).

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—TECHNO-GEEK TEACHER WEBSITE RECOMMENDATIONS

Online you will find recommendations for building your own website (SM12) and for designing PowerPoint presentations (SM13). The techno-geek teachers believe these websites provide the best support for teachers. Check them out and evaluate them for yourself.

Wikispaces <http://www.wikispaces.com> (Put your classroom online)

Blogster <http://www.blogster.com> (Organize a class blog)

Museum Box <http://museumbox.e2bn.org/>

Rubistar <http://www.rubistar.com> (Create rubrics)

Teacher Tube <http://www.teachertube.com> (Teaching material)

Prezi <http://www.prezi.com> (Presentation formats)

Google <http://www.sites.google.com> (Create websites)

Edutopia <http://www.edutopia.org/> (Online community for teachers)

Alan November <http://novemberlearning.com/team/alan-november/> (A techno-geek's website)

BrainPop <http://www.brainpop.com/> (Teaching material)

Education World <http://www.educationworld.com/> (This site has everything)

Google in Education <http://www.google.com/edu/teachers/> (This site has everything)

Teaching Channel <https://www.teachingchannel.org/> (Videos of model lessons)

Join the Conversation — *MrSteinGlobal*

Stu Stein is a high school social studies teacher who “talks” with his students online using instant messages. He set up a separate screen name with his Internet provider, *MrSteinGlobal*, and told students he would be online Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 7 to 8 pm. Any student who has a question can reach him then. At other times, they can send him an email and he responds as soon as possible. At the beginning of the semester, most students shy away from contacting him, so he uses the time looking for materials for lessons. However, as the semester goes on and students begin to realize they can actually reach him with their questions or just talk with an adult, it gets busy. A lot of time is spent helping students with Internet research, especially sorting out credible from inappropriate sites. He also uses the Internet to post weekly homework assignments and other class announcements. However, Stu finds the best thing about *MrSteinGlobal* is that it gives him an opportunity to get to know his students in an informal atmosphere and develop a bond with them.

Questions to Consider:

1. Many teachers are concerned about “drawing a line” between themselves and their students. Do you think *MrSteinGlobal* is an appropriate or inappropriate use of technology?
2. Do you have confidence in your own ability to use technology in the classroom and in lesson preparation? Explain.

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8

ASSESSMENT: HOW SHOULD TEACHERS ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING AND THEIR OWN PERFORMANCE?

Former New York City Mayor Ed Koch had a way of springing up all over the city, continually asking constituents, “How am I doing?” However, in recent years the phrase has been associated with elected officials who seem to reappear shortly before election day to solicit support for their campaigns. Whatever you think of politicians, it is a fair question that needs to be asked by officeholders as well as by schools and teachers. The problems in both cases are, “What criteria should we use to assess performance?” and “How accurate are measuring instruments?” In addressing these questions, I am going to use sports metaphors. If you are someone who hates sports, please bear with me.

Cuba Gooding Jr.'s character in the movie *Jerry Maguire* (1996) offers us a clue in his well-known refrain, “Show me the money!” As a football player seeking a new contract, Gooding evaluates his agent, while the team evaluates Gooding, based on performance standards. How well did Gooding's character perform compared with similar athletes? Is he receiving a commensurate salary? Both the athlete and the agent may seek additional rewards based on effort or potential, but in general, the bottom line in sports today is, “What have you done for me lately?”

Even among elite athletes, establishing criteria for performance assessment is difficult. During the 2002 Winter Olympics, a major international controversy erupted when a gold medal in figure skating was awarded to the Russian team. Eventually the medal was shared with Canadian competitors; however, the underlying problem, that evaluation is based on inexact and often arbitrary judgments, remained.

School systems like to pretend that the evaluation of students and teachers is more or less an exact science, like comparing the numerical statistics of quarterbacks rather than the hard-to-measure performance of offensive tackles or ice skaters. But there are so many intangibles in sports that even a comparison of quarterbacks is difficult. Which should count the most: completion percentage, yardage gained, touchdown passes, team victories, or performance in big games such as the Super Bowl? For example, Hall of Famer Joe Montana did not always have the best numbers, but he seemed to star in the biggest games. Arguing about who is a better player is a big part of the fun of being a sports fan, but no fun at all for teachers trying to evaluate students.

Supposedly objective rules can also be surprisingly arbitrary, so that small changes significantly alter the performance of key participants. During the 2001 baseball season, a redefined “strike zone” (higher and narrower) contributed to a 10% decline in the number of runs scored, home runs, and walks. Power pitchers

with rising fastballs benefited the most from the change, whereas many control pitchers, who liked to “nibble” at the corners of the plate, could not consistently get batters out. The rule changes affected players in different ways and had nothing to do with how hard they worked or their skills or their moral qualities as individuals. People who had honed their games to the old rules, and were unable to adjust, had their careers threatened.

There is a comparable phenomenon of assessments influencing results in gymnastics. Have you ever wondered why the highest scoring competitors among the men are in their middle to late twenties, whereas the best performers among the “women” are teenage girls? It is not because of a law of nature, but because of the way performances are evaluated. In men's gymnastics, the highest scores go to routines that emphasize strength, so older, stronger, and more experienced men score higher. In women's gymnastics, the highest points are awarded to routines that emphasize balance and flexibility, so younger, but not necessarily more talented, women win the events. If women were graded using the same scale and routines as men are, there would be different medal winners.

Arbitrary rules and assessments play a similar role in educational evaluation. For example, in September 2001, the incoming freshman class at the University of California differed demographically in significant ways from the previous year (Holmes, 2001). Part of the change was caused by the university's decision to count scores on the verbal and math knowledge parts of the Scholastic Aptitude Test less, while giving heavier weight to student performance on subject-specific tests, including foreign language examinations. As a result of the new criteria, native speakers of Chinese, Spanish, and Korean earned admission to the university at a higher rate than in the past. A fair change? Maybe. An objective law of nature? No way!

The point I am making is that assessment is nearly always arbitrary and often unreliable. The question for us as teachers then becomes: “Can we design assessments that facilitate the ability of students to demonstrate what they have actually learned?” I believe the answer is a qualified “yes.”

An additional problem with assessment has been described by Claude Steele, a psychologist from Stanford University in California. Steele has conducted a number of experiments in an effort to explain the “performance gap” (the difference between expected and actual scores) of African Americans and women on certain types of standardized assessments and sometimes on school performance in general.

Steele (1999) argues that all people are members of some group about which negative stereotypes exist, and that they experience “stereotype threat” as a result—“the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (p. 44). His research shows that as a result of the additional stress caused by stereotypes that claim that African Americans are not as smart as Whites or that women cannot do complex math, even top African American and women students score significantly below expectations on specific tests.

Steele's studies suggest that repeated poor performance on tests and failure in school feeds into student resistance to learning. As they seek to avoid uncomfortable situations that provoke stereotype threats, they refuse to do work, do not study for exams, and may even disrupt classes. The most important and hopeful aspect of Steele's work is that he found that when teachers were able to reduce the stereotype threat felt by students, the “performance gap” virtually disappeared.

This chapter explores the very inexact science of assessing student learning and teacher performance.

Sections examine different approaches to the assessment of student work, the way to design fair assessments, the debate over national standards and standardized tests, and an examination of why teachers should continually reassess their own practice. Online you will find essays on the debate over evaluating teachers based on student performance on standardized tests (E19 and 21), confronting the global achievement gap (E20), and the problem of cheating (E22). There are also sample rubrics for grading student work (SM14 and 15) and ideas for assessing your own performance as a teacher (SM16).

Authentic assessment of student performance is not an easy task. As a high school teacher, I continually found myself sweating over grades and offering students other opportunities to demonstrate what they learned and what I taught. Consider these key terms used in discussion of student performance in school.

STANDARDS: Formal content acquisition and skill development goals for student achievement developed by state education departments, school districts, and national educational organizations. Sometimes they are coupled with instructional strategies for teachers and assessment tools.

STANDARDIZED ASSESSMENT: Standardized assessment devices, especially multiple-choice tests, measure narrow areas of competence. Advocates for this type of assessment argue that results on these tests accurately and objectively measure a student's general level of achievement.

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT: Direct evaluation of student competence in different areas using various assessment devices, including standardized tests. Performance assessment attempts to directly measure a student's ability to think critically, write clearly, express ideas orally, and work cooperatively.

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT: A form of performance assessment that minimizes the use of tests and encourages the direct assessment of student performance during learning activities and through the evaluation of student work.

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT: Students' performance is evaluated based on a collection of their work assembled over an extended period. The portfolio demonstrates growth as well as final achievement.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: The idea that teachers, individually and collectively, need to constantly reevaluate their performance in order to assess whether they are achieving their goals.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Questions to Consider:

1. What are your views about standards, testing, and assessment?
2. What were your experiences as a student? How do these shape your views as a teacher?

Section A: How Should Teachers Assess Student Learning?

Emphasis on expanding student content knowledge and improving basic academic skills is often coupled with the demand for more rigorous assessment of both students and teachers. The current push for standardized testing across the United States had its origins in the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*. The report charged that the country was threatened by a “rising tide of mediocrity” in public schools, and unleashed a movement for test-driven curriculum change that, in theory, promotes academic excellence. By 2000, every state but Iowa had established statewide academic standards and 27 states had implemented high-stakes testing programs. Pressure for more uniform national learning standards coupled with standardized assessments continued throughout the decade, supported by the Obama Administration's Race to the Top initiative, the National Governors' Association, the Gates Foundation, and a number of major publishers including Pearson. By June 2012, 48 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia formally adopted national Common Core Standards (discussed in [Chapter 3](#)). For more about these developments and responses by critics, I recommend a book edited by Kathy Swope and Barbara Miner (2000), *Failing Our Kids: Why the Testing Craze Won't Fix Our Schools*, and a more recent article at the Rethinking Schools website.

For people who support standardized assessments, testing serves multiple functions. Tests direct classroom curricula and measure student knowledge, the competence of teachers, and the performance of schools and districts. In general, the “standards movement” relies on fact-based multiple-choice exams as the most cost-efficient objective measures of student achievement.

Educators who are skeptical about this approach to teaching and learning often raise the following questions:

- What do fact-based multiple-choice examinations actually tell us about student understanding?
- Is there a correlation between more rigorous testing and the expansion of content knowledge and critical understanding or a commitment to active citizenship?
- Will pressure on teachers to have their students score higher on standardized tests force them to emphasize drilling basic skills and the memorization of facts at the expense of more interesting and valuable types of classroom instruction?
- Does “prepping” students for tests enhance their learning or simply invalidate the tests as meaningful measurements?

As an education student in college and a beginning teacher, I was taught techniques to design supposedly “fair” tests with “good” questions. At the end of the marking period, we were supposed to average up test scores; add or subtract a few points based on factors such as class participation, attendance, and handing in assignments punctually; and then assign a scientifically precise numerical grade that summarized a student's performance in class. In theory, teachers did not evaluate students; our job was to calculate and record the grade they had earned—a task now made easier by computer programs such as Microsoft Excel. We were also advised to do the following:

- Encourage competition between students for higher grades. This would ensure that they studied.
- Make all of the choices on multiple-choice tests the same length. Unequal length would tip off

students to the right answer.

- Avoid letting “B” be the right answer too often. It is the most popular “wild guess” answer.
- Be careful not to make “All of the above” a choice only when the answer we want is “All of the above.”
- Use different types of questions (e.g., fill-ins, matching, multiple -choice, short description, and longer essays) so students cannot anticipate the kinds of questions you would ask. If they do, they will not study as hard.
- Throw in a few questions about really obscure points. This rewards students who do all of the homework, encourages the others to work harder, and gives you a spread of grades.

Although some of this advice is useful, I believe that something is seriously wrong with an approach to testing and grading that is only indirectly related to instruction and the assessment of learning. When the purpose of testing is to assign grades, tests and grades become weapons to control classes and make students do the work through extrinsic rewards and punishments. Students who try, but do not do very well, are offered extra help, but ultimately are put in “slower” classes where they can “experience success.” Those who failed the tests because they did not seem to care are cajoled with threats, calls, or letters home; low grades; or failure for the course. Students who do well on tests are rewarded with high grades, certificates, and recommendations for better high schools and colleges.

On the other hand, I believe there are also good reasons for testing and evaluating students. Students have a right to know how they are doing compared with other people doing similar work. This makes it possible for them to assess their activities, make decisions about their priorities, and evaluate their goals. In addition, as teachers, there are things we need to know so we can do our jobs effectively. Assessing student learning helps us evaluate our performance. *As a rule of thumb, if students did not learn something, you did not teach it.* Some important questions that assessment helps us think about include the following:

- Does the curriculum make sense to the students? Does it connect with who they are? Does it take into account their level of academic skills and help to improve them?
- Am I teaching effectively? Is the class as a whole learning? Are the books and materials appropriate? What do I need to change?
- Do individual students understand what they are studying? How can I respond to their specific needs and motivate them to try again or try harder? How do I help students assess their own learning so they can use this knowledge as a way to expand their understanding? What will make it possible for every individual to succeed in class?
- Are students doing the classroom and homework assignments? Are the assignments reasonable and interesting? Which assignments should be kept? Which ones should be modified? Which ones should be dropped?
- Are my assessment tools accurate measures of what I am trying to assess? Am I testing recall, the ability of students to read and write, or higher-order skills such as understanding and the ability of students to use ideas?
- Can I assign students composite grades at the end of marking periods and semesters that have meaning to them and will encourage them, rather than just reward or punish them?

In John Dewey's view, assessing (comparing, analyzing, sorting, organizing, exploring, experimenting) is how human beings learn. What teachers need to assess is not the information that students know, but how effectively students are integrating information into their world view. A significant question is whether teachers can effectively measure this type of learning using standard assessment devices: short answer tests, essays, written reports, and classroom presentations.

Grant Wiggins (1998), a major advocate of performance assessment, is critical of most testing, which he argues only measures the least complex levels of human thought. Wiggins challenges educators to assess student performance on the higher-order thinking skills identified in Bloom's taxonomy. For example, a student's ability to synthesize information and create a new understanding requires creativity and judgment. This kind of thinking stimulates diverse and unexpected responses that are not easily measured on a multiple-choice exam.

Wiggins argues that the key to employing Deweyan ideas is to view assessment as an ongoing part of a learning process, in which people repeatedly test their knowledge and their skills, and adjust what they do and how they do it based on what they discover. This is very different from creating tests that measure a limited form of knowledge at a particular point. Wiggins suggests that teachers think of their students as workers (e.g., historians, writers, or mathematicians) who are continually enhancing their skills as they create increasingly more complex products. The difficult task for teachers is establishing criteria for evaluating these products during the process of creation and after they are completed. I believe that certain principles can guide teachers as we work to discover more authentic ways of assessing student understanding. These principles include the following:

- Assessment of student performance should be on the full range of what is being taught in class. That includes content knowledge and academic skills. It also includes the acquisition of social skills; an understanding of key concepts; the ability to gather, organize, present, integrate, and use information; and the ability to explore values and ideas and use new understandings to reconsider the way we understand and appreciate a particular subject and the broader world.
- Assessment should be part of the learning process. It should be continuous so that students have feedback on how they are doing.
- Teachers should use tests to discover what students know, not what they do not know. A reasonable assumption is that when students are excited about what they are learning and do well on tests, they will want to learn more.
- If test scores are going to reflect what students are learning, they need to be designed for specific classes. Prepackaged and standardized tests are based on the assumption that the same things are happening in widely diverse settings.
- Although the criteria for assessment should be clear to students, they should also be flexible. Assessment is relative, not absolute. It involves judgments where people can legitimately disagree.
- Assessment is most effective when it includes individual self-assessment.
- Authentic assessment of student learning requires examining a number of types of activities at a series of points in the learning process and using different criteria and assessment devices to evaluate student performance. We do not measure temperature with a speedometer. How can a matching quiz measure

a student's understanding of democratic values?

- The goal of assessment is to encourage and assist learning. Tests and projects should not be used to punish or sort students. Everyone who works hard and does well should be able to receive the highest evaluation.
- If the ability to work hard in an organized and disciplined fashion is one of the things teachers want students to learn, effort should count in an evaluation of students' work.
- If we want students to learn how to work collectively, take responsibility for group activities, respect the value and contributions of other people, and play leadership roles, performance on group activities should be factored into an evaluation of a student's work.
- Students with limited academic skills should be able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of a subject in ways that are appropriate to their skills. Imagine you are a chef being tested on your ability to cook a new dish, but the recipe is written in a language you cannot read. Would this be a fair assessment of your ability or knowledge?
- Teachers are assessing knowledge and understanding of a subject and academic and social skills, not a student's qualities as a human being.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—STANDARDIZED TESTING

Questions to Consider:

1. Where do you stand on the national debate over standardized assessments? Why?
2. What are your views on the following questions asked earlier in this section?
 - What do fact-based, multiple-choice examinations actually tell us about student understanding?
 - Is there a correlation between more rigorous testing and the expansion of content knowledge and critical understanding or a commitment to active citizenship?
 - Will pressure on teachers to have their students score higher on standardized tests force them to emphasize drilling basic skills and the memorization of facts at the expense of more interesting and valuable types of classroom instruction?
 - Does “prepping” students for tests enhance their learning or simply invalidate the tests as meaningful measurements?

Section B: How Can Teachers Design Fair Assessments?

As a high school teacher, I used multiple forms of assessment in my classes, including standard short-answer and essay tests geared to the academic level of my students. Most students found my tests challenging, but not tricky. There is no simple rule for the frequency of tests, the number of questions on a test, the type of questions, the vocabulary level used in questions, the time allocated for a test, or the weight assigned to different kinds of questions. A lot of test design is based on a teacher's judgments about her or his class and the points and skills being stressed in a particular unit. I tended to give short tests on a more frequent basis to classes in which students had greater academic difficulty. I found that this gave more structure to their studying and allowed me to target specific academic skills. Otherwise, I gave full-period exams at the end of a unit as part of the process of pulling together what we had been learning.

In subjects such as music, art, language arts, and second-language acquisition, tests primarily include performance-based assessments. In social studies, math, and science, teachers need to be more imaginative when designing tests so that they focus on problem-solving skills, laboratory experiments, or primary source document analysis. The following are my suggestions for the design of effective and fair tests. Online you will find sample rubrics prepared by members of the New Teachers Network for assessing student essays, oral presentations, and projects (SM14).

- Test what you taught. That was what you presented to students as the more important things to learn. When I was a student we hated teachers who filled tests with obscure points from the textbook. This practice only increases competition, undermines community, feeds student resistance, and encourages marginal students to give up.
- Test what students know. When students fail miserably, teachers have no way to evaluate what they learned and we taught. I take questions and activities directly from class activity sheets, homework assignment questions, and class notes.
- I am looking for mastery, not perfection. If the vocabulary and skill level required by every question is designed to be very difficult, a student who basically understands the work will end up performing poorly on the test. If questions have different levels of difficulty, it makes it easier for teachers to learn what students can actually do.
- Students do better when presented with a variety of learning activities. It makes sense to use a variety of question formats.
- Evaluating essay answers requires a grading strategy. The three major approaches are “holistic” grading of entire essays, assigning a specific number of points for each section of an essay, or using assessment rubrics that give students credit for including different types of evidence and arguments and for the effectiveness of their writing. I have used all three strategies, and I do not think there is one correct approach. However, whatever approach you take, a teacher needs to be as consistent as possible so students know what to expect when they write essays.
- Discuss test design and grading criteria with students in advance. Involving students in assessment can, but does not necessarily, mean they participate in deciding their own grades. It definitely means that students are involved in developing the parameters for class projects and deciding the criteria for

assessing their performance in these activities. The benefits of this student involvement include a deeper understanding of research methods, insight into the design and implementation of projects, a greater stake in the satisfactory completion of assignments, and a sense of empowerment because assessment decisions are based on rules that the classroom community has helped to shape.

- Students do not do their best when anxious. In order to relax students, Steve Marlow of the New Teachers Network plays soft music while students take exams. Another alternative is to allow students who perform poorly an opportunity to take a retest.
- Time pressure should not be a major factor. Everybody should be able to finish the test. If students need more time, let them come back later in the day, during lunch or a free period. This takes some of the pressure off students who score poorly because they get anxious or because of academic difficulties.
- Even when tests are “fair” assessment devices, teachers have to decide how much to weigh different parts of a test and how to evaluate student answers on essay questions. Try assigning point values to questions after you see how students perform on a test. If many students do poorly on one part, assume the problem was either your teaching or the test itself, and count those questions less. By being flexible, you get a more accurate measure of what students understand, avoid demoralizing students with low test scores, and eliminate the practice of having to curve grades.
- Grades should not be rationed. Our goal is for everyone to do well. There is no reason that every student cannot receive an “A”.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—FAIR ASSESSMENT

Question to Consider:

I think the preceding ideas provide for effective and fair assessment. Do you agree? Explain.

Section C: Ideas for Designing Fair Tests that Authentically Assess Student Understanding

The kind of questions teachers ask on tests depend on what they are trying to assess. Standard question formats include short-answer or fill-in, matching, true-false, multiple-choice, short or extended essays, and document-based short-answer or essay questions.

Short-answer or fill-in, matching, and true-false questions generally test whether students recall specific factual information. Multiple-choice questions can be used to test factual recall or conceptual understanding. Short or extended essays and problem-solving and document-based short answer or essay questions are usually used to assess conceptual understanding and academic skills.

Sample Social Studies Questioning Alternatives (11th-Grade U.S. History)

The Battle of Saratoga (1777) is considered a major turning point in the American Revolution because a victory by American forces persuaded France and Spain to enter the war as allies. Alternatives A-D are fact-based questions requiring recall of a specific piece of information. Alternative A offers students the least information to start with so it is the most difficult to answer.

- A.(Short answer/fill-in) Identify the Battle of Saratoga (1777).
- B.(Matching) Battle of Saratoga (1777) and major turning point in the American Revolution
- C.(True-false) The Battle of Saratoga (1777) was a major turning point in the American Revolution.
- D.(Multiple-choice) Which battle was a major turning point in the American Revolution? a. Quebec (1759) b. Boston Massacre (1770) c. Saratoga (1777) d. Yorktown (1781) e. Gettysburg (1863)

Alternatives E and F are concept-based questions requiring an understanding of main ideas about the American Revolution. The questions contain the information and students are asked to explain the significance of the event. Alternative E asks students to select from possible explanations. Alternative F is a more difficult question because it requires that students provide the explanation.

- E.(Multiple-choice) Why was the Battle of Saratoga (1777) a major turning point in the American Revolution?
 - a. A victory by General Washington persuaded the Continental Congress to continue the war.
 - b. Victorious American forces ended slavery in the northern states.
 - c. A victory by American forces persuaded France and Spain to enter the war as allies.
 - d. British victory at Saratoga ended all hope that Canada would join the colonial uprising.
- F.(Short essay) Write a paragraph explaining why the Battle of Saratoga (1777) is considered a major turning point in the American Revolution.

Sample Science Questioning Alternatives (9th-Grade Geology or 10th-Grade Biology)

The Burgess Shale are metamorphosed sedimentary rocks in the Canadian Rockies that contain extremely rare 500-million-year-old soft-body fossils of aquatic animal life from the Cambrian era. They are of major evolutionary significance because of their age, because they help illustrate the impact of geological change on

evolution, and because some of the fossilized animals are from phyla with no surviving species. Alternatives A- D are fact-based questions requiring recall of a specific piece of information. Alternative A offers students the least information to start with so it is the most difficult to answer.

A.(Short answer/fill-in) Identify the Burgess Shale.

B.(Matching) Burgess Shale and metamorphosed sedimentary rocks in the Canadian Rockies vthat contain extremely rare 500-million-year-old soft-body fossils from the Cambrian era.

C.(True-false) The Burgess Shale are metamorphosed sedimentary deposits in the Canadian Rockies that contain extremely rare 500-million-year-old soft-body fossils from the Cambrian era.

D.(Multiple-choice) How old are the fossils discovered in the Burgess Shale?

- a. Cambrian (500 million years ago) b. Carboniferous (350 million years ago) c. Jurassic (200 million years ago) d. Tertiary (50 million years ago) e. Unknown

Alternatives E and F are concept-based questions requiring an understanding of main ideas about the importance of the Burgess Shale, evolution, and geology. The questions contain the information and students are asked to explain the significance of the event. Alternative E asks students to select from possible explanations (in this case the best answer is “All of the above”). Alternative F is a more difficult question because it requires that students provide the explanation.

E.(Multiple-choice) Why are fossils contained in the Burgess Shale considered of major evolutionary significance?

- a. Some of the fossilized animals are from phyla with no surviving species.
- b. They are from the Cambrian era, which makes them among the oldest fossils on earth.
- c. They contain rare impressions of soft-body parts.
- d. They are imprints of aquatic animal life found at high altitudes in the Canadian Rockies.
- e. All of the above.

F.(Short essay) Write a paragraph explaining why Cambrian-era fossils contained in the Burgess Shale are considered of major evolutionary significance.

Sample Middle-Level Math Problem Solving

This format provides students with a context for understanding and the information they need to solve the problem. They are assessed on their ability to find a solution, present the information, and explain their solution.

You are on a trip to Canada during summer vacation. In the morning you turn on the news to hear projections for the day's weather. When the weather forecaster announces that the temperature is 28 degrees, you quickly realize that she is reporting the temperature using the Celsius scale. You remember from school that on the Celsius scale water freezes at 0 degrees and boils at 100 degrees. On the Fahrenheit scale water freezes at 32 degrees and boils at 212 degrees.

1. Write a paragraph explaining your strategy for translating Celsius temperatures into Fahrenheit temperatures.
2. Present a mathematical formula for translating Celsius temperatures into Fahrenheit temperatures.
3. Create a chart showing the Fahrenheit equivalents for the temperatures 20–30 degrees Celsius.

Sample Middle-Level General Science Problem Solving

This activity assesses student understanding of the process of scientific exploration. It encourages students to observe closely and systematically, establish criteria, evaluate similarities and differences, and draw conclusions based on recorded observations.

- Provide an individual or team of students with a bag containing 12 assorted items (e.g., metal nails, bones, crayons, coins, plastic spoon, rock, screwdriver, ceramic cup, dried beans, rubber band, CD, stick).
- Students must write descriptions of each item, create categories (e.g., shape, color, function, whether it is part of something else, whether it was made by people, etc.) that allow them to sort the items, divide the items into the different categories, and then write explanations for their choice of categories and their assignment of the items.

Sample Middle-Level Written Response Question for English or Social Studies

This format provides students with information orally and in writing. It requires them to use the information to take and support a position and present it in written form. Teachers can change or modify the reading passage depending on their experience with the academic performance of students in a class, topics being discussed in a unit, or student interest. Possible speeches include Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman”; Abraham Lincoln, “Gettysburg Address”; Margaret Chase Smith, “Republican Declaration of Conscience”; John F. Kennedy, “First Inaugural Address”; Martin Luther King Jr., “I Have a Dream”; Malcolm X, “Message to the Grass Roots”; Ronald Reagan, “The Evil Empire.” As an alternative, students can write letters in response to an article in the local newspaper on a controversial issue. Students can share their letters and selected pieces can be submitted to the editors for publication.

Directions to students: You are on a committee trying to decide which speech from U.S. history will be reprinted in the eighth-grade yearbook. I will read a speech aloud to the class and then you will have an opportunity to read it to yourselves. After I read it aloud a second time, you must write a letter to the eighth-grade advisor explaining why you believe this speech should or should not be selected. In your answer, explain the criteria you are using to select a speech. Provide specific examples from the speech that show how it either meets or fails to meet your criteria. Your letter should be between three and five paragraphs long.

Sample Document-Based Questions

I define documents very broadly. They can be pictures, cartoons, songs, poems, charts, graphs, maps, and written material.

- Provide students with a historical picture or photograph and ask them to either answer questions or

write a description of the visual image in prose, poetry, or song.

- Provide students with a speech, newspaper article, song, poem, or passage from a novel and have them draw a picture or poster or create a diorama illustrating or explaining the document.
- Provide students with a chart or table of information and ask them either to answer questions or to create a bar or circle graph using the data.
- Provide students with a bar or circle graph and ask them either to answer questions or to create a chart or table using information from the graph.
- Have students write a paragraph or an essay comparing or integrating information from a series of documents.

From Picture to Paragraph, from Paragraph to Picture

During the Great Irish Famine (1845–1851), *The Illustrated London News* had artists draw pictures to accompany news stories. They are available at the website *Visions of the Famine*, compiled by Steve Taylor (n.d.). The article “The Ejectment” (1848) (shows a family being evicted from their home during the famine. Write a paragraph describing people and events in the drawing.

In the passage that follows, Olaudah Equiano (also known as Gustavus Vassa), an enslaved African, describes the “middle passage” from Africa to the Americas. Read this excerpt from his autobiography and draw a picture (or create a diorama) to illustrate the text (Gates, 1987).

The Life of Olaudah Equiano

I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation (greeting) in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste any thing. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. I would have jumped over the side, but I could not; and, besides, the crew used to watch us very closely who were not chained down to the decks, lest we should leap into the water: and I have seen some of these poor African prisoners most severely cut for attempting to do so, and hourly whipped for not eating.

The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. The air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died.

I was soon reduced so low here that it was thought necessary to keep me almost always on deck; and from my extreme youth I was not put in fetters (chains). In this situation I expected every hour to share the fate of my companions, some of whom were almost daily brought up on deck at the point of death, which I began to hope would soon put an end to my miseries.

One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen who were chained together, preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the nettings and

jumped into the sea; and I believe many more would very soon have done the same if they had not been prevented by the ship's crew, who were instantly alarmed. In this manner we continued to undergo more hardships than I can now relate, hardships which are inseparable from this accursed trade. Many a time we were near suffocation from the want of fresh air, which we were often without for whole days together.

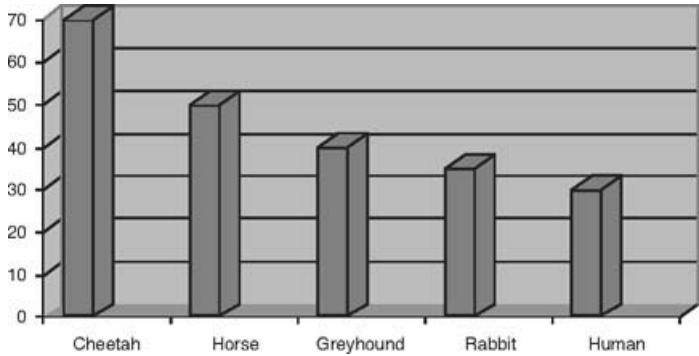


FIGURE 8.1 Some Animals That Run Faster Than Human Beings (numbers are in miles per hour)

Table 8.1 Animal Species Threatened with Extinction in the United States, 1991

<i>Animal</i>	<i>Threatened</i>	<i>Endangered</i>	<i>Total</i>
Mammals	8	55	63
Birds	12	73	85
Reptiles	18	16	34
Amphibians	5	6	11
Fish	34	54	88
Shellfish	10	55	65
Insects and Spiders	9	16	25

From Chart to Graph, from Graph to Chart

Graphs provide dramatic visual images and help us compare information from different categories. Use the information from the chart, “Animal Species Threatened with Extinction in the United States, 1991” to create a vertical bar graph. Whereas graphs provide dramatic visual images, charts make it easier to use numbers. Use the information from the graph, “Some Animals That Run Faster Than Human Beings,” to create a chart and calculate the average speed in miles per hour for these animals.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—SKILLS AND CONTENT ASSESSMENT EXAMINATIONS

The Board of Regents of the New York State Department of Education requires that secondary school students take skills and content assessment tests in different subject areas designed to measure whether they are achieving the state's academic standards. In order to earn a diploma, students must pass examinations in mathematics, science, English, foreign language, global history and geography, and U.S. history and government. The test questions are written by teams of teachers. Sample middle and high school level tests are available for examination on their website at: www.nysd.gov/ciai/assess.html.

Questions to Consider:

1. Select and evaluate a national, state, or district standardized test in your content area. What types of questions are being asked?
2. In your opinion, are the content and level of difficulty appropriate to the grade level of students being assessed?
3. If you were on a committee of teachers invited to submit questions for the test, what kind of questions would you add? Why?

Section D: What Does a Student Portfolio Look Like?

Student portfolios have been offered as a way to more effectively evaluate the full range of a student's mastery of a subject or a skill. A portfolio can include different types of writing, projects, reports, presentations, and even tests, but it is not simply a collection of student work. For it to be a useful document, it should be integrated into the instructional and assessment fabric of a school's program and provide students with opportunities to reflect on their growth and learning and explain why they selected a particular piece for inclusion in their portfolio. Effective portfolio programs also need to provide students and teachers with specific guidelines for creating, assembling, and evaluating student work. A multitude of questions have to be addressed when a teacher or school establishes a portfolio program.

- Who defines what goes into a portfolio—individual students and teachers, the academic department, school or district administrators, or a state's regulatory body?
- Can portfolios accurately measure the full range of skills, attitudes, content knowledge, and conceptual understanding developed during a course or multiyear program?
- Will students be involved in defining portfolio topics and projects, deciding on the products that will be evaluated, and the evaluation process itself?
- Are portfolios comprehensive documents showing the full span of a student's work, or do they contain a selection of typical, or perhaps exemplary, efforts?
- How much weight will be given to effort, the process of creation, and the final product in assessing student work?
- Does individual growth count or only a student's final achievement?
- How will growth, the process of creation, and effort be measured?
- Can portfolios include group as well as individual work? If they can, how will a student's participation in a group project be evaluated?
- What standards should be used to evaluate the quality of work at different points in a student's secondary school career?
- Can evaluation be objective or even systematic?
- How do programs avoid the mechanical application of portfolio design and assessment?
- Will schools and districts sacrifice student experimentation and creativity as they try to ensure that minimum guidelines are met?
- Can portfolio assignments and even entire portfolios receive meaningful number or letter grades?

The Center on Learning, Assessment, and School Structure (Wiggins, 1996–1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) addressed some of these questions in proposals for integrating portfolio creation and assessment into classrooms. It recommends involving students in clearly defined and guided multistep projects that are evaluated at different points in the creative process. It also recommends detailed assessment rubrics that examine both content and presentation.

The Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS) in New York City, which is part of the Coalition for Essential Schools, offers an even more radical departure from traditional assessment. CPESS requires that seniors create and defend 14 portfolios to graduate (Meier & Schwartz, 1995). Each student selects seven

major areas and seven minor areas for portfolio development. Four of the major areas are required of every student: science/technology mathematics, history and social studies, and literature.

At CPESS, student portfolios reflect cumulative knowledge and skills acquired by students while at the school. They demonstrate students' command of information about the subject, their ability to explain their own and other people's points of view, their ability to draw connections between different topics, their ability to think creatively about the subject, and their ability to explain the broader relevance of their work. Students work with staff advisors to prepare their final portfolios and a presentation to the graduation committee for review and evaluation. The committee assesses a student's portfolio using an established scoring grid that weighs both the substance and style of the work. When portfolios need to be modified or expanded, students are given the opportunity to complete the necessary work and resubmit the portfolio for approval.

The majority of the material included by students in their portfolios is originally done as coursework. The inclusion of collaborative work is encouraged. Interdisciplinary projects can be submitted in more than one portfolio area. Because each student works at a different pace and in a different way, and because students bring a diversity of academic, social, and cultural experiences with them to their work, CPESS has no single prescribed formula for completing the portfolio assessment process.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM

In a survey of 21,000 students by Josephson Institute of Ethics, 70% of high school and 54% of middle school students admitted cheating on an exam (Altschuler, 2001). Also, 97% of high school students let someone copy their work. The Internet and word processors have also made it easier for students to acquire and camouflage other people's work. Teachers have one of two options. The first is to crack down on students by monitoring their work and punishing malefactors more severely. The second is to integrate instruction and assessment so students are continually producing and updating work and the end product is the result of an ongoing process. Some of my thoughts on why students cheat are included in an online essay (E22).

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you believe there has been an expansion of student cheating in school in recent years? Explain your views.
2. The Judeo-Christian Bible recommends that someone who is “without sin” should throw the first stone at a person accused of an infraction such as cheating. When you were in school, did you “cheat” on tests and reports? Why? What would have made you stop?
3. In your opinion, which of the strategies described previously would be more effective at reducing cheating by students? Explain.

Section E: How Should Teachers Assess Their Own Practice?

One of the main reasons for teachers to assess student learning is to understand our own performance. Examining student work makes it possible to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching practices and curricula and to decide whether individual lessons and activities connect to and scaffold on prior student understanding and experience. The assessment of students helps teachers figure out how to better prepare, to more successfully present ideas in class, and to achieve goals. It makes possible what Dewey and other educators have called *reflective practice*.

Dewey (1933) believed that human beings have “an innate disposition to draw inferences, an inherent desire to experiment and test. The mind ... entertains suggestions, tests them by observation of objects and events, reaches conclusions, tries them in action, finds them confirmed or in need of correction or rejection” (p. 9). In my experience, what Dewey called an innate disposition is better understood as a potential. Human beings have the capacity to reevaluate, draw connections, and learn, but that does not mean we always engage in reflective practice.

Reflective practice, the idea that teachers, individually and collectively, need to constantly reevaluate their performance in order to assess whether they are achieving their goals, can be approached in a number of ways. It can be informal or take place in regularly scheduled support meetings. David Morris (whom you met in [chapters 2 and 3](#)) and I used to discuss our teaching on a daily basis over lunch. For many years, Rhonda Eisenberg (whom you met in [Chapter 2](#)) and I met informally with other young teachers once a week at a local community center. The New Teachers Network enables teachers to share ideas and discuss issues at bimonthly meetings and via the Internet. Rachel Thompson (whom you met in [Chapter 6](#)) has lessons taped so she can observe, evaluate, and change her performance as a teacher.

Classroom observation forms can be especially useful for focusing attention on what is actually taking place in the classroom. Online you will find forms for observing individual students, classroom interaction, and teacher decision-making (SM15).

Classroom teachers Michael Pezone, Lynda Costello-Herrera, Nichole Williams Allen, and Adeola Tella-Williams participated in field testing the New York State Great Irish Famine curriculum in their classes ([Chapter 7](#)) as part of an action research project. The value of including action research in our teaching is that it encourages us to more systematically evaluate our ideas, knowledge of curriculum, and teaching methods. Using action research in class, teacher-researchers can identify particular issues or questions; develop strategies for addressing them; and, through recurring cycles of teaching, observation, conversation, and reflection, test and revise our teaching strategies.

Myles Horton (Horton & Freire, 1990) suggested an additional dimension for action research. He called on teacher-researchers to “Experiment with people not on people.... They're in on the experiment. They're in on the process” (p. 148). This is a valuable idea for a number of reasons. Involving students in action research projects adds to their sense of ownership over what goes on in classes, and it helps them understand what it means to be a historian or scientist. Additionally, when students are part of the research team, assessment of student learning becomes less a battle of wills and more a part of the learning process.

At this point, I want to return to the Army Air Corps Technical Schools Teachers' Manual for one last visit. In an effort to encourage reflective practice and self-evaluation, the manual offers new teachers a 34-point checklist to consider as they assess their performance. I think it is a very useful list.

Evaluating Your Performance as a Teacher

(With help from the World War II Army Air Corps Technical Schools Teachers' Manual)

1. Am I really interested in teaching this class, or is it just another chore for me?
2. Am I punctual in getting to class and do I start and close my class on schedule time?
3. Do I systematically check ventilation, light, heat, seating, and cleanliness of my classroom?
4. Do I make an effort to study the men and women in my classes as individuals so that, knowing their peculiar weaknesses, difficulties, and needs, I can help them better?
5. Am I reasonably friendly and cordial with my students, or am I impersonal and distant?
6. Am I at ease before my students? Have I any annoying or distracting mannerisms?
7. Am I resourceful and adaptable? Do I feel the pulse of the class, know when to tell a good story, crack a joke, or let them rest for a minute or two?
8. Am I easily irritated? Am I ever sarcastic?
9. Is my voice clear, pleasing, and well modulated?
10. Am I guilty of patronization?
11. What do my students think of my class? Have I ever discovered their real opinions? Have I ever asked them at the completion of my course to let me have their unsigned, honest comments, criticisms, and suggestions?
12. Do I encourage students by finding something to praise in the work of every earnest and industrious worker?
13. Am I patient with the slower students, and do I provide enough suitable work for the quick learners to challenge their ability?
14. Do I merely hear recitations, or do I really teach my subject so that its real value in the lives of these learners and in the work of the world is made clear?
15. Do I prepare my lessons carefully before coming to class, making sure of a definite aim for each lesson, the steps to be taken, the materials to be used, the points to be made, the method to be used, and the means of measuring the results?
16. Before teaching a new lesson or taking up a new job, do I prepare my class for it by reviewing previous lessons and experiences and by explaining the new work clearly?
17. Do I make sufficient use of illustrations, concrete examples, maps, blackboard diagrams, and charts to make instruction clear?
18. Do I use models, pictures, cut-away parts, slides, and movies to demonstrate and illustrate the points I wish to make?
19. Do I make every effort to interest and to arouse these learners, to guide them in conference and discussion, and to influence them helpfully?
20. In my teaching, do I use language that is simple and clear to all? Do I talk too much?

21. Does my teaching develop sound thinking procedures?
22. Do I set definite standards for my students to attain, and do I insist that each student meets them?
23. Do I check on each job done in my shop or class, to see that it meets the standards for neatness, accuracy, and excellence?
24. Am I sure that each student understands fully and exactly the particular job she or he is to do?
25. Am I sure that a student really understands what she or he says?
26. Do I help a student to correct his or her mistakes and misunderstandings or do I merely reveal them?
27. Have I learned to question effectively? Do my questions reach and stimulate all in the class? Are they clear, simple in phrasing, and always addressed to the entire class? Do I call on the slower and the normal students, or do I usually direct my questions to the bright students?
28. Do I insist on proper answers addressed to the class? Do I permit the class to answer in concert?
29. Do I check, through questioning, to see whether students really understand what I say? Do they really understand how to perform the required operations in any job?
30. Do I make definite and regular assignments and do I hold my classes strictly accountable for the preparation of such work?
31. Do I always make sure that my students are ready and prepared for the new assignment?
32. Am I in full control of my group at all times? Do I know what each student is doing? Do I see and hear all that goes on?
33. Do I stand while teaching? Do I move about the classroom occasionally?
34. Do I measure the success of my teaching by what my students know and do as the result of having worked with them—not by my prior record?

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—EVALUATING YOUR PERFORMANCE

Questions to Consider:

1. I have argued that teachers need to empathize with students and have a sense of “mission” to be successful. Would you add these qualities to this list? Why?
2. Which of these questions do you consider most important for evaluating the performance of a teacher? Select five and explain your choices.
3. Which of these areas are your greatest concerns as you prepare to become a teacher? Select three and explain your choices.
4. Which of these areas or questions would you drop as of limited importance for evaluating the performance of teachers? Explain your choices.

Section F: High-Stakes Testing for Teachers and Student Teachers

In September 2012, 25,000 Chicago public school teachers went on strike closing the school system for over a week. One of the more contentious issues precipitating the job action was an effort by the Chicago Public School District to impose a new teacher evaluation system that most teachers and school-based administrators found unwieldy, unfair, and inaccurate. In order to secure a federal Race to the Top grant, in 2010 the state of Illinois passed a law mandating that student performance on standardized exams count for a minimum of 25% on annual teacher evaluations. The Chicago district initially demanded that student performance count for as much as 45% of a teacher's evaluation (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alan-singer/chicago-teachers-strike-f_b_1877178.html; <http://www.ctunet.com/blog/frequently-asked-questions-on-the-cps-evaluation-system>, accessed November 19, 2012).

The new evaluation systems are a result of educational reform efforts such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, intended to improve the level of instruction for all children. They are supported by the broader availability of new technologies that allow for online reports and analysis. They were also pushed for by private for-profit media and publishing companies that were looking to sell products to school districts and state education departments.

Advocates for the new evaluation systems claim they will help define good teaching and locate and promote the best teachers. Critics fear they will homogenize instruction, force teachers to follow scripts in order to receive positive ratings, and will drive creative teachers out of the profession and actually lower the quality of instruction and education.

Although teachers, school-based administrators, and parents in Chicago and around the country generally supported the Chicago teachers' union, many major news outlets rushed to condemn the strike. *The Chicago Tribune* accused the union of trying to “water down” teacher evaluations (Sept. 12, 2012). An editorial by the general manager of *Fox News Chicago* called on Chicago's parents to express their outrage at the teachers and demanded that the mayor “Hold firm ... on your call to put the school children of Chicago first” (Sept. 12, 2012). *The Washington Post* blamed Chicago teachers for “resisting much needed education reforms” (Sept. 9, 2012). A *New York Times* editorial (Sept. 9, 2012) called the strike “Chicago Teachers' Folly” and argued that the strike was a “senseless,” “unnecessary,” “personality clash” led by a union leader “basking in the power of having shut down the school system,” that not only would the strike hurt the children of Chicago but it would undermine the credibility of teacher unions.

As the strike entered its second week, *The New York Times* ran a second editorial “In Search of Excellent Teaching” (Sept. 17, 2012). This editorial condemned “traditional teacher evaluations” as “ cursory,” resistance to change as “outrageous,” and “disastrous teachers” who “continue as long as they wish, hurting young lives along the way.” The editorial highly praised new teacher evaluation systems utilizing student performance on standardized exams in Montgomery County, Maryland, New Haven, Connecticut, and Washington, D.C. which it found demanding yet flexible. But what the editorial never examined was whether these new evaluation systems actually led to improved student learning.

Some of the most highly touted and sophisticated new teacher evaluation systems take what they call a “value-added” approach, a term borrowed from economics, where it means the difference between the

production cost of a product and its sale price. In education, it refers to how far a teacher improved the performance of students on standardized exams compared to the performance of students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds (Wisconsin Center for Education Research, April 2008).

In a frequently cited study, “The Long-Term Impacts of Teachers, Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood” (Harvard University, n.d.), researchers followed one million children from a large urban school district as they moved through school from fourth grade into adulthood. They compared where former students were at age 28 and found that people who had had teachers with higher value-added rankings were “more likely to attend college, earn higher salaries, live in better neighborhoods, and save more for retirement. They are also less likely to have children as teenagers.” This study has been used as evidence that the “value-added” approach to evaluating teachers and other rubrics that rely on student test performance are crucial for improving education in the United States.

However, a professor of economics at Columbia University who reviewed this study found significant flaws that invalidated major conclusions. Among other things, he discovered that the statistical advantages accrued by students with high value-added teachers, particularly the claim that they earned higher annual earnings, disappeared if you focused on people who were age 30 rather than 28. He felt the authors of the study had focused on age 28 because they wanted to prove what they were looking for in the first place. Based on his analysis of their data, he concluded that the value-added evaluation method was “nothing more than a union-busting, pro-privatization trick that is based on partisan economics” (CounterPunch, Sept. 14–16, 2012).

If all of this leaves you a bit confused about the usefulness of new teacher and student teacher evaluation systems, join the club. The problem for us, however, is that student teachers and teachers are going to be evaluated according to these new rules whether we like them or not. We have no choice but to be as familiar with them as possible. I want to thank Jessica Cartusciello, a social studies teacher at Island Trees High School and a student in the doctoral program at Hofstra University, for helping me make some sense out of these new systems.

Student teachers and new teachers both face new evaluation systems that are supposed to better measure their potential or effectiveness as teachers. These standardized evaluations, which have been called high-stakes tests for teachers, combine performance assessments with the scores their middle school and high school students earned on state and national skills and content tests.

For student teachers, the most commonly used new assessment is called the Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA or edTPA). It was developed by a respected team of educators connected with Stanford University in California, who were working with the Pearson publishing company. A number of state education departments adopted this measure for evaluating student teachers and granting teacher certification. TPA requires students in teacher education programs to assemble materials that represent the way they teach students in their student teaching classroom or other instructional settings. Major parts of the TPA portfolio include lesson plans with clear goals that are aligned with state and national standards, carefully developed teaching strategies and activity sheets, video clips demonstrating classroom competence, samples of student work to substantiate learning claims, and evidence of reflective self-assessment, the ability to adjust to students and circumstances, and a commitment to continued growth. The portfolios are evaluated by teams of teachers

and retired teachers hired by the Pearson company, which also sets the grading norms and ultimately decides who will be recommended for state certification.

Assessment by Pearson, rather than the TPA itself, has drawn most of the criticism. In 2012, students and teachers in the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus School of Education helped launch a national campaign challenging the forced implementation of TPA (*New York Times*, Apr. 7.). They argued that the field supervisors and cooperating teachers who guided their teaching practice and observed and evaluated them for six months in middle and high school classrooms were better equipped to judge their teaching skills and potential than people who had never seen nor spoken with them. They refused to participate in a pilot program organized by Pearson and to submit the two 10-minute videos of themselves teaching and a take-home test. They were supported by United Opt Out National, a website that organized a campaign to boycott Pearson evaluations of students, student teachers, and teachers (United Opt Out, n.d.)).

As of this writing, the TPA was still being field tested so I could not examine the actual rubrics for evaluating student teachers. However, a preliminary rubric I developed at Hofstra University to assist students with the TPA is online (SM16).

I was able to visit a website created by Pearson as part of the field test in Ohio, Tennessee, and Washington states (<http://tpafieldtest.nesinc.com/>, accessed November 19, 2012). The website was promoting a Pearson ePortfolio system, which it claimed was “designed specifically to support the administration of the TPA, from providing access to handbooks and templates through to the final submission of the candidate's portfolio.” Participants in the field test were able to upload material for evaluation without charge on Pearson ePortfolio and Schools of Education had the option of using other electronic systems. However, it was clear that Pearson was promoting a product that would be for sale.

The most useful part of the website was a downloadable pamphlet, *Making Good Choices: A Support Guide for the Teacher Performance Assessment*, that was prepared by Stanford University. It is organized to answer anticipated questions asked by people who are completing teacher education programs and submitting material for evaluation. Questions include:

- How much information should I convey about my students when describing my class?
- How do I select the central focus, student content standards, and learning objectives for the TPA?
- What is the emphasis I need to attend to in my subject area?
- How should I select the appropriate state student content standards for my TPA?
- How do I select a learning segment?
- Why is attention to my students' backgrounds, interests, and needs important when planning my lessons?
- What kinds of assessments should I plan for the TPA learning segment?
- How detailed should my lesson plans be?
- How specific do my reference to research and theory have to be?
- How will the evidence of my teaching practice be assessed?
- What kind of student assessment should I choose for the TPA?
- What are evaluative criteria?

- How specific should I be about what I would do differently if I could re-teach my learning segment?

I prepared this summary guide to the Teaching Performance Assessment for my own student teachers based on material distributed by Pearson and Stanford University. I think you will find it useful as you prepare your certification portfolios.

Introduction. The Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) is an assessment of the readiness of teacher education candidates to become certified teachers. In a shift from past practice, which focused on the knowledge of candidates about their content area and teaching practices, it focuses on the learning by students in your student teaching classroom. Candidates develop an integrated portfolio of material used in the classroom to support their application for certification. It must demonstrate the candidate's abilities, knowledge, and skills as a beginning teacher.

Assignment. Candidates submit “artifacts” from actual lessons that they taught and reflective commentaries to demonstrate how they planned and implemented instruction that promoted student learning. Artifacts include lesson plans, instructional materials, assessments, video clips of a candidate's teaching, and sample student work. Reflective commentaries provide background on the lessons and an opportunity to analyze teaching practice and student learning.

Assessment. The portfolio will be evaluated according to five dimensions of teaching: Planning, Instruction, Assessment, Analyzing Teaching (Reflection), and student use of Academic Language. According to the TPA, academic language means the vocabulary and conceptual understanding students need to understand and communicate with others in a specific subject discipline such as biology or history.

Submissions. Candidates submit background information on lessons; lesson plans; instructional material such as activity sheets, PowerPoint presentations, and media; assessment tools; three samples of student work; evidence of in-depth feedback to two students; a reflective assessment commentary that includes future strategies based on the assessment of student work and use of language; and two or three things you would have done differently. In addition, each candidate must submit two video clips of up to 10 minutes in length. Candidates are responsible for securing permission to video from schools and parents and must provide their own equipment.

Professional Responsibilities. Candidates are responsible for protecting the confidentiality of students, cooperating teachers, and schools. They must acquire permission, cite sources, align instruction with state and national standards, and collaborate with other student teachers, school personnel, and university supervisors to develop their teaching practice.

As a beginning teacher, you will be confronted by an entirely new set of rubrics and evaluations that I am certain will be continually modified and reformulated. According to Jessica Cartusciello, the weight assigned to different performance criteria and the criteria themselves will vary from state to state. For example, in New York State 60% of a teacher's evaluation will be based on rubrics designed to measure a teacher performance during classroom observations by a subject-based administrator or a school's principal. The remaining 40% of a teacher's evaluation will be based on the composite academic achievement of students in his or her classes.

The state mandates that at least 20% of a teacher's total evaluation be based on student grades on state administered standardized tests. The other twenty percent of the score is left up to local districts. It can be based on the standardized test scores, third-party assessments, or student performance on locally developed but state-approved tests.

The New York State website provides a list of approved teacher practice rubrics. They include Danielson's Framework for Teaching, Marshall's Teacher Evaluation Rubric, Marzano's Causal Teacher Evaluation Model, Marzano's Teacher Practice Rubric, the NYSTCE Framework for the Observation of Effective Teaching, NYSUT Teacher Practice Rubric, and Thoughtful Classroom Teacher Effectiveness Framework (New York State Education Dept., Feb. 2013).

The Danielson's Framework for Teaching (The Danielson Group, 2011) and Marshall's Teacher Evaluation Rubric (The Marshall Memo, 2013) are probably the best known of these teacher evaluation systems. Charlotte Danielson is a former teacher and administrator from New Jersey. The rubric divides teaching into four domains for (1) evaluation, planning and preparation, (2) classroom environment, (3) instruction, and (4) professional responsibilities. Marshall's Teacher Evaluation Rubric was created by Kim Marshall, a former Boston middle school teacher and principal. The Marshall rubric evaluates teacher performance in six areas: (1) planning and preparation for learning, (2) classroom management, (3) delivery of instruction, (4) monitoring, assessment, and follow-up, (5) family and community outreach, and (6) professional responsibilities. Online you will find a sample from Kim Marshall's Teacher Evaluation Rubric, part of the Danielson Group's "Framework for Teaching," and an essay, "Measure for Miss-Measure with New York City Teacher Assessments," based on a column I wrote for *Huffington Post* about problems with standardized teacher assessments.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION-HIGH STAKES TESTS FOR TEACHERS

Questions to Consider:

1. Examine some of the recommended rubrics for student teachers and teachers. How can they be useful as guidelines to effective teaching?
2. Interview a working teacher to learn what he or she thinks about the movement to standardized teacher assessment.
3. You all have participated in complex tasks. In your opinion, can these tasks be effectively broken up into individual components that can be evaluated according to a standard rubric? Explain.

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9

SUPPORT: HOW CAN TEACHERS PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS HAVING DIFFICULTY IN SCHOOL AND LIFE?

In order to do well in school, most adolescents need places where they feel safe and “normal.” Those of you who remember being teenagers, or who already have teenage children, know that finding such a space in school, at home, in a community-based program, or in a social group is not always easy.

Teenagers need a place that is theirs, a place with which they can identify and for which they can take responsibility. A classroom, even when it is organized as a community, can be large and overwhelming. Teenagers need to relate to each other and to adults in smaller, often less structured spaces (e.g., teams and clubs). When I was in middle school my homeroom teacher, Miss Berkowitz, took me under her wing. She was also my algebra teacher and she encouraged me to be on the school's math team. The team met during lunch period, a time when I normally played ball in the schoolyard. One thing Miss Berkowitz always did was to make sure we ate lunch. I lived in a single-parent family and sometimes my father would forget to leave lunch money when he rushed out early in the morning. On days when I did not have money for lunch, Miss Berkowitz always lent me what I needed. I stayed with the math team, and missed a number of ball games, largely because of my relationship with her.

Sometimes providing support means that a teacher needs to give a student a little space. Everybody has “bad hair days.” Treat students the way you would want to be treated if you had just had a fight with your mother, were overtired, or just plain grumpy. Instead of backing a student into a corner and provoking an explosion, give them that space.

This section opens with an examination of what it means to treat students as human beings. Online, you will find a companion essay by Judith Kaufman (E23), a professor of human development and educational psychology at Hofstra University, on the difficult world children and adolescents can face in our society. Members of the Hofstra New Teachers Network discuss their own experiences as teenagers, the kind of support they needed, and the way their experiences shape them as teachers. Two of their stories are included in the text and three others are online (C9). There is a discussion about dealing with tragic events in schools such as 9/11 or the devastation caused by natural disasters, while online you will find essays about at-risk youth (E24), the school-to-prison pipeline (E25), the problem of violence in schools (E26 and SM17), and the fact that teachers, especially new teachers, need support too (E27).

Section A: What Does It Mean to Treat Students as Human Beings?

Judy Kaufman teaches child and adolescent development to elementary and secondary education students in the Hofstra University School of Education. For this edition of *Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach* she did an extended rewrite of her original section, “Valuing What Our Students Know,” which now appears online (E23). Judy believes that most of the problems associated with adolescence arise because “teenagers are trapped in a world where they are no longer allowed to act like children, but are not permitted to be adults.” According to Judy, “Adolescence is not a natural phenomenon or developmental stage, but rather a modern social construction.”

I see Judy's ideas as an extension of a debate that started in seventeenth and eighteenth century Western Europe over the nature of human nature. Leading participants in the European Enlightenment included British philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), the Scottish thinker John Locke (1632–1704), and the French *philosophe* Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778). In the United States, Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) and Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) were both identified with this intellectual movement.

I suspect Hobbes would have been a very strict classroom teacher, believing that “It is not wisdom but Authority that makes a law” and supporting the need for “common power to keep them all in awe” and suppress their “natural passions.” Locke, who is best remembered for his belief that “Liberty is to be free from restraint and violence from others,” would probably have permitted much more freedom in his classroom if he were a secondary school teacher. For Locke, “The end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom.” Meanwhile, Rousseau would probably have had a completely open classroom. After all, he believed “No man has any natural authority over his fellow men” and was deeply concerned that “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.”

Judy Kaufman's beliefs about education are rooted in her ideas about child and adolescent development and the nature of what it means to be human. They are summarized here.

1. Humans are born with almost infinite potential.
2. Children who do not have privilege based on their skin color or class membership, or who have experiences that are at variance with the middle-class expectations of public schools, often find school a devastating experience.
3. If teachers want to help children explore possibilities for being and acting in the world that far exceed the limits of particular boxes, then they must strive to learn about the lives of the students they are going to be teaching.
4. Most problems associated with adolescence arise because teenagers are trapped in a world where they are no longer allowed to act like children, but are not permitted to be adults.
5. Adolescence is not a natural phenomenon or developmental stage, but rather a modern social construction. Adolescence is a phenomenon of the U.S. capitalist economy that began with the Industrial Revolution. It functions to keep teenagers out of the permanent labor force.
6. The problems facing adolescents are not their raging hormones, but the contradictory messages and

limited information they receive about appropriate sexual behavior.

7. Schools should be organized to create experiences for children and adolescents that reflect who they are in the world and that make it possible for them to both acquire and critique the values of the adult community.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION-WHAT IS HUMAN NATURE?

Questions to Consider:

1. What is your view on the need to control human, especially adolescent, “passions”?
2. Judy Kaufman has ideas about teenagers and education that may be considered controversial by some. Which of her ideas do you agree with? Which do you disagree with? Why?

Section B: Becoming a Teacher: What Kind of Support Do Teenagers Need?

In this section, members of the Hofstra New Teachers Network who had to overcome adversity as teenagers in order to receive an education, start a career, understand themselves, or even to survive, discuss their personal experiences. As teenagers, these teachers struggled with difficult issues such as coming to terms with sexual identity, eating disorders, migration to a new country, juvenile delinquency, poverty, and gang violence. They explain what life was like for them as teenagers, the support they received from teachers and other adults, the kind of support that would have been helpful to them, and the way their personal experience influences the way they respond to their students. Stories by Samuel Charles and Ruth Santos are in the text; stories by Lauren Rosenberg, Adeola Tella-Williams, and Jackie Benjamin are online (C9).

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—IS IT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF TEACHERS?

Questions to Consider:

1. In your view, is it the responsibility of schools and teachers to deal with problems like the ones discussed in these autobiographies? Explain.
2. Samuel Charles and Ruth Santos in the text and Lauren Rosenberg, Adeola Tella-Williams, and Jackie Benjamin online tell stories that are moving and painful for them. If you had a story like these, will you be willing to share it with other teachers? Would you be willing to share it with students who are experiencing similar difficulties? Explain.

A Couple Since They Were Fourteen

by Samuel Charles and Ruth Santos

Samuel Charles and Ruth Santos are pseudonyms. The authors of these essays were inner-city youth who statistically were not supposed to make it. They decided to use pseudonyms to respect the privacy of family members.

Samuel, who is African American, and Ruth, who is Puerto Rican American, grew up in the Edenwald/Baychester section of the Bronx in New York City. It is a neighborhood dominated by a large public housing project and low middle-class working families where poverty and drug-related crime were endemic during their teen years. The families in these communities had to struggle to find a quality education for their children. Peer pressure and materialism that were rampant in the 90s made it difficult for the urban youth to focus on school. The cultural transition that was taking place displaced the educational priorities of prior generations.

In school, they both resisted placement in academically advanced classes because they did not want to be teased by the other children. The value embedded in advanced courses wasn't conveyed to them. Although they were tracked and deemed as “special,” for some reason they didn't feel special. For Samuel and Ruth, being tracked was more of a social negative. It was a stigma that made them feel like outliers.

Samuel's father was a “numbers” runner for an illegal gambling operation in Harlem. During those times African American men without an education had to earn a living and “running numbers” provided the means to earn a living if they didn't have an education. Although the relationship between Samuel's father and mother didn't work out, the father did the best he could for his sons. He was able to financially provide for them until he became sick in 1990.

The pressures of the break up were hard on Samuel's mother. She had to work two jobs to keep them together. Because of this, Samuel had major responsibilities supervising his younger brother. Academically, Samuel's brother struggled with school. He was tracked in special education and never graduated. The lack of an education ultimately pushed Samuel's brother to the streets. As they grew older, Samuel turned to

sports, while his brother became involved with drugs and violence, eventually ending up in jail.

Ruth's grandparents migrated to New York from Puerto Rico but her family has not lived the "American Dream." Her father, who was incarcerated on drug charges and died of HIV/AIDS, was never really part of her life. While Ruth was in fourth grade, her stepfather, a Viet Nam veteran who had been exposed to Agent Orange, died of a liver-related disease. For much of her childhood and adolescence, the family depended on public assistance.

Ruth and Samuel have been a couple since they were 14 years old and students in junior high school. They believe their relationship with each other was the most important element in their survival and success. After attending a suburban college, they returned to live and work in the Bronx. They now have two children and are both school administrators in New York. Ruth began her career as a mathematics teacher at a public secondary school (grades 7–12) where students wore uniforms in the African American community of Harlem. She is currently a math chairperson who is responsible for supervising other math teachers in her school. Samuel started his career as a social studies teacher and dean at the Bronx high school he attended as a teenager. He is now the assistant principal at a large high school in a largely minority suburb of New York City. In these essays they explain what made it possible for them to survive and succeed against the odds.

For this edition of *Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach* Ruth adds an extended section on what she has learned during the last decade as a teacher and school administrator. It is a statement about teaching, but it is also about the importance of education, and the ability to succeed in life.

I have learned that the most important skills that students take out of the classroom are determination and their work ethic. I do not let them give up on themselves and I never give up on them. I have learned that students want a teacher that cares about them. "Bells and whistles" mean nothing if a student does not sense that the teacher cares.

As an administrator I hear the same complaint from students that a particular teacher does not care over and over again. When I ask students what made the difference for them or why a certain teacher was their favorite, they always say it was the teacher who cared about them.

I have also learned that students must learn from their own mistakes. However, when they are ready to change we must make sure that they are not shut out and that they are given the opportunity to correct their mistakes.

Students in urban schools deal with many issues in their home lives, many of which they have no control over. I let students know they can overcome these drawbacks by focusing on their education. When a student has been absent for 15 days and then returns to school he or she is welcomed back into my classroom and treated like any other student. After class I let the student know how they can catch up. I want to make sure they do not feel defeated and that there is a way to come back from their mistake.

I have taught long enough to have students who graduated college and are set in their careers. It makes my heart proud to see how successful some of them have become. There is nothing more rewarding than the feeling that I took part in getting them there. When they visit they tell me how they remember the

quadratic formula because of the song I sang, how much fun they had playing math games in class, or that I fed them breakfast the day they had to take a major standardized exam for graduation.

I am passionate about the field of education and feel that it is the great equalizer. I used my education to better my situation in life and I strive every day to motivate students to do the same. I have been able to provide a better life for my own children than I had and I hope will be able to do the same for their children. My son has completed his first year in college and my daughter has just been inducted into the junior National Honor Society. Samuel and I are still together and own a home in the suburbs.

“I Am Tired of Seeing Black and Latino Students Not Succeeding”

by Samuel Charles

I grew up in the Bronx three or four blocks from the Edenwald projects. Edenwald had a really bad reputation. There were shootings there and drug dealers. I grew up in the late 1980s and early 1990s when crack was problematic for politicians, police, educators, and our community. Some of my friends had older brothers who were big-time dealers with reputations in the community before they went to jail. The problems of crack created an element of fear, stress, and hopelessness for many of the students who I went to school with.

Lack of direction and role models in the community pushed many of us to participate in activities that were detrimental to our futures. In many cases we did things that would follow us for the rest of our lives. Two of my best friends got locked up after an accident in a stolen car. I never stole cars, but I rode in them because it was something fun to do. It was poor judgment. We did things that were daring and dangerous. The choices we made were due to a lack of guidance and too much free time. We needed activities and positive things to associate ourselves with.

My brother was involved in drugs and violence. He was younger than I am, but he was a tough guy. Everybody in the community knew him and knew not to mess with him. I was into sports, but he thought money was glamorous. He liked to have large sums of money at his disposal. My brother went to a special education school and was suspended numerous times. He was tracked because of his behavior. He could not read well and no efforts to make him successful were displayed by him or his teachers. He was definitely discouraged with school. I believe he felt, “I can't do this work, why am I even bothering to try?” He became a street kid and there was no one home to stop him. He was an angry guy and when he turned 21 he got in heavy trouble with the law. I joined the Five-Percenters in the Nation of Islam.

There were no organized gangs like the Bloods and Crips are today. We defined our identity by the block where we lived; every block had its own “posse”. I was involved in fights with my posse, but we did not have guns although gun violence was bad in the 1990s.

Looking for cultural direction, role models, and a sense of self, I joined the Five-Percent Nation of Islam. The group was quasi-religious and philosophical. You joined this group because you were searching for knowledge as a young Black male. A lack of cultural awareness in schools and no cultural studies courses

in high school, you learned your culture from whoever was able to teach it to you. A lot of us did not have fathers at home, so we turned to people who seemed to have knowledge of the world like the Five-Presenters and the Nation of Islam.

One of the things that made a difference for me was that I had confidence in myself. In addition to having the work ethic, I was able to do the schoolwork. I had the ability, so when I was motivated, I experienced success in school and wanted to be successful. School is like a game for most students, when you are successful and winning you wanted to play more. However, if you keep losing, you begin to lose your zest to play and give up. When teachers realized I had the ability and wanted to succeed, they invested in me. My fourth-grade teacher brought me to her house and taught me to use her computer.

In ninth grade, I joined the school baseball team and started to go out with Ruth, who was in the 9SPE (Special Program Enrichment). Being with Ruth made it cooler to be smart and being on the team grounded me. Ruth helped me in math and we would get together and do homework. I was still absent from school a lot and cut.

Sports provided me with male role models and gave me something to do that kept me out of trouble, and shaped my goals. Because of team sports, I had something to look forward to each day, responsibilities to live up to, and a foundation for my life. In high school, I played football, baseball, and ran track. I was a starter and a captain so people looked up to me.

In high school, I had teachers who saw that I had ability and wanted to learn. I was placed in college-bound classes. I did not care about Arista and the honor society, nevertheless, teachers introduced me to these things. My English teacher encouraged me to join the debate team and even called my house to recruit me.

Their idea of caring about students is what shapes me now as a teacher and administrator. When I walk into a classroom I tell the class, "I do not care if you are the best student or the worst student, it is my job to care about each and every one of you." I believe in tough love. No handouts. The key to success is hard work. I insist that every student have a notebook binder, paper and a pen. I challenge them if they do not do their homework. I encourage them to arrive to class on time. I call home and speak with parents over the smallest things. I put in this type of effort; because I care about the students and want to see them be successful.

As a high school student, I did not want to disappoint people who felt I could do better. I remember I passed the Math Regents exam with a 68. My teacher expected me to score over 90 and I felt bad that I let this teacher down. When teachers care about students they try harder because they do not want to let you down.

The teachers that students considered good when I was in high school were the teachers that made the class interesting. I believe when a teacher makes the class interesting, students will want to learn. Someone may not be a "rocket scientist" in every subject, but if a student enjoys class, he or she will grasp the main ideas and become a better student. I try to use the introduction to a lesson to connect the subject matter with the lives of students in my class. We may start out talking about the way people are treated because of their race, gender, sexuality, or beliefs and suddenly we are learning about conditions for slaves in ancient

Rome.

I became a dean because it makes it possible for me to deal with a larger number of students, not just the ones in my classes. I want to turn a low-performing school around. I am tired of seeing a large number of Black and Latino students not succeeding in school and in life. I believe through modeling, education, and guidance students can improve academically.

“I Did Not Want to Be Another Hispanic Statistic”

by Ruth Santos

My mother moved us around a lot when I was a little girl. We lived in the South Bronx until I was in second grade, we moved to Baychester for a couple of years and then to the Eden-wald area near Samuel's family. My mother had me and my older sister by her first husband and two children by her second husband. My mother did not graduate from high school because she got pregnant with my sister. However, when she was older, she got her GED and an associate's degree. Most of the time we were on welfare or had social security and veterans benefits because of my stepfather.

As a young girl I was really embarrassed about being on welfare. The kids in school made fun of you if you were on welfare or had to use food stamps. From as early as kindergarten I wanted to do well and make something out of my life. I wanted to be important, a professional with a good job. When I first started school I was sent to the resource room with other kids for special help in reading. But I was faster than everyone else and eventually I was put in a regular class. I was always a good math student, but I am not sure why. I remember that when I was in kindergarten the teacher gave me a math game and I loved it. I must have been lucky to have elementary school teachers with solid math backgrounds.

When I did well in seventh grade, they put me in the 8SPE class (special program enrichment), but like Samuel, I was embarrassed and did not do that well. I did not fail, but I was never in the top group. In ninth grade, I started to do well. It was the love of math that got me through. I found high school easy. I was never concerned if teachers were boring. I figured they had a job to do and I had a job to do. I just went to class, took notes, and did my homework. I got exceptional grades, I was always a 90s student, because I did my work. I was always a quiet person and kept mostly to myself. I cannot think of any teachers who reached out specially to help me before I got to college.

My motivation to succeed came from inside me. I joined the debate team because I wanted to compete against Samuel and his school. The Mock Trial coach sought me out for the team but I quit because there were students on the team who made fun of me because I was so nervous. When one of the cool kids laughed at me, I quit. The coach never came after me to find out why.

My older sister had a baby when she was 14 years old. But she still graduated from high school and went to a two-year college. My mother and the rest of our family helped her pull through. Luckily, I did not get pregnant, even though Samuel and I had unprotected sex. We had a lot of free time together and did not really know what we were doing. We tried condoms and other methods but we were not always careful. If I

got pregnant in high school, my mother would have wanted me to have an abortion, but I think I would have kept it like my sister. I always believed if you were dealt it, you could deal with it.

I finally did get pregnant with my son when I was 18 and a freshman in college. I was frightened it would destroy my dreams, but I would not let it. I took off one semester but then continued with my plans. I did not want to be another Hispanic statistic. I experimented with alcohol when I was 12 or 13 but I stopped. Samuel and I managed to avoid drugs. I saw what it did to people in my family. Samuel was an athlete so he looked down on drug use and alcohol also. Samuel and I were together so we were able to resist peer pressure to use drugs. We supported each other and protected each other.

I probably am a pretty traditional teacher. The big difference in what I do is that many math teachers make things too complicated by using sophisticated mathematical language that interferes with student learning. I always try to teach in ways that students will understand. As a math teacher, I could have a higher paying job in the suburbs, but I always promised myself that I would return to the city. I feel an obligation to give back to young people growing up like I did.

Money was never the most important thing for me. I feel I could have done anything I wanted to do, but I decided to become a math teacher in the city to make a difference. A lot of my students remind me of myself, especially the girls. I am not sure if I do the best job for them. I am a very private person. I do not like people to pry into my life and I try to respect their privacy. I always feel I could do better as a teacher. The students say I am good, but I do not feel I am good enough. There are still students I do not reach and I cannot make them love math. I want to do more, I just do not know how to yet.

Five years ago I was offered a position as an Assistant Principal at a diverse mid-sized high school in midtown Manhattan. I have been there ever since. I was a math coach at my previous school a couple of years before moving into this position. Supervising teachers is a challenge. It requires the ability to teach pedagogy and motivate people to continue to grow in their practice. This position allows me to impact so many more students than just teaching. In my five years I have supervised mathematics, special education, physical education, and science. I currently supervise mathematics and science.

I still teach at least one class per year. I have taught all levels of student in my 15-year career. I truly believe all students can learn. Students need to be motivated to learn by allowing them to feel some sense of success. A student who doesn't feel they can do it and is constantly failing will give up and shut down. When I teach I break the mathematics down to the simplest skills and scaffold to make sure that students see how a topic builds on prerequisite skills they have learned in the past. I have grown with the times by incorporating technology and differentiating my instruction. I am willing to take chances and do what it takes to make my students feel a sense of success.

Section C: Online Stories About Providing Support for Teenagers

Stories by Lauren Rosenberg, Adeola Tella-Williams, and Jackie Benjamin are online at <http://www.routledge.com/cw/singer-9780415534604>. I worked with Lauren Rosenberg when she was a student teacher and observed her classroom while she was still a beginner. Lauren is a fabulous teacher who lights up her classroom with her smile. However, in teacher education classes, she tended to be very quiet. Lauren says she is the same way in most situations with adults. In this essay she tells about her experience as a teenager and young woman with low self-esteem who suffered from an eating disorder. She wishes to thank two teachers, her eleventh-grade history teacher, and a graduate school professor who taught a class on gender issues in education, for modeling ways that teachers can make a difference in the lives of their students.

Although she was born in the United States, as a child Adeola Tella-Williams lived in Nigeria, West Africa, with her father's family. In 1987 at the age of 11 she was reunited with her mother in the United States. Adeola could not read or write English when she arrived. However, after she completed high school she attended Virginia Union University, where she graduated with honors and then earned a teaching certification as part of her master's degree at Hofstra University. She has been a cooperating teacher and an adjunct at Hofstra and was involved in developing and field testing an Irish Famine and a Slavery curriculum for New York State. Her main area of interest is helping young girls become aware of their potential so they can become leaders in their community, the nation, and the world. In 2005 she founded a program in her school district for girls, called Rites of Passage.

During her first two years as a teacher, Adeola Tella-Williams involved her classes in the reading buddies program discussed in [Chapter 4 Relationships](#) and in the development of differentiated texts. She was a superior student in the teacher education program and is now an outstanding teacher. I was surprised when I learned that Adeola had had difficulty in school and could not read until she was in sixth grade. Her story illustrates the potential for excellence possessed by many students, a potential that is often ignored because of problems with language.

Jackie Benjamin is a young European American woman who “grew up in a suburban community where it was very important to fit in and not be different from everyone else.” She discusses grappling with her sexual identity, her realization that she is gay, and the impact of her experience and understanding on her teaching. When she wrote this, she was 23 years old and had just completed her first year teaching English in a suburban middle school. She decided to use a pseudonym because of homophobia in our society and concern that it would prevent her from earning tenure. However, for the new edition of *Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach* to use her real name.

Section D: How Should Schools Deal with Tragic Events?

In the aftermath of the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City in September 2001, there was widespread discussion of how to support children who lost family members or were upset by events. Many school districts had decided that the best policy was not to discuss the events, even after some students had witnessed the explosions from their classroom windows. I encouraged teachers from the New Teachers Network to give students an opportunity to voice their concerns and fears in class in a supportive environment with peers and adults that they knew and trusted. Otherwise, the option for many students was to learn about what was happening from rumors circulating around the building or from friends after school. Most leading psychologists agreed with confronting events openly, that it is a mistake to try to protect children by avoiding discussion.

Unfortunately, school violence and natural disasters appear to be increasing in frequency and necessitating greater diligence on the part of school personnel. In 2005 Hurricane Katrina and in 2012 “Superstorm Sandy” caused widespread devastation in different regions of the United States. Schools were closed and numbers of students were left homeless or forcibly relocated. When schools finally reopened, teachers had to help their students adjust to these events and changes in their lives. Online you will also find a discussion of events that took place in Columbine and Aurora, Colorado.

Many members of the New Teachers Network, as well as their students, were displaced by “Superstorm Sandy.” In our discussions we came up with a series of ideas to help young people see themselves as people who respond to crises and are not just its victims.

1. Students need a place where they can discuss what happened and share their stories with adults they trust and their peers. Schools are that place.
2. Teachers should encourage students to write their own stories and interview family, friends, and neighbors.
3. Students can raise money and collect supplies for hurricane relief and rebuilding. As they become more aware, they can also raise money for people in other parts of the world who experience natural disasters.
4. Classes can create a magazine telling the story of the class, school, and community.
5. Students can photograph the community and create a digital local history of “Superstorm Sandy” online at the class website.
6. Students can create a museum exhibit combining scientific explanations, oral histories, and community history.
7. Students can become advocates for rebuilding, planned responses to future natural disasters, and for addressing problems such as climate change.

The National Education Association in conjunction with the American Federation of Teachers, the National PTA, and the National Association of School Psychologists circulated a list of recommendations for parents, teachers, and caring adults, which we support. Although it primarily addresses the needs of younger children, its approach is definitely appropriate for adolescents as well. The list included these

recommendations.

1. Model calm and compassionate behavior and remind children how much we love and care about them.
2. Establish routines that provide structure and comfort in daily life-have dinner together, read a bedtime story together, and help with homework.
3. Jumpstart a conversation with a question, share your feelings, and be a good listener.
4. Ask what they know and how they are feeling. Allowing children to voice their views provides a greater sense of control over their environment.
5. Observe and be responsive to children's emotional state. Be prepared for some regressive behavior and "acting out." Children will express their emotions differently. Provide time for writing, drawing, and other ways to express feelings.
6. Design a family or school activity that involves children in helping others.
7. Tell children the truth. Grieving is natural and the process should be acknowledged and shared.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—ADDRESSING TRAGEDY

Question to Consider:

Should teachers give students an opportunity to voice their concerns and fears about tragic events such as the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing of a federal office building, or natural disasters? Explain.

10

STRUGGLE: HOW CAN WE BE MORE EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND BUILD BETTER SCHOOLS?

Frederick Douglass, born a slave in Maryland in 1817, escaped to freedom as a young man and became an abolitionist, author, orator, U.S. government official, and an international spokesperson for human rights. In a letter written in 1849, Douglass argued, “The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle. If there is no struggle, there is no progress” (Seldes, 1966, p. 214).

Margaret Mead was a path-breaking anthropologist who argued that scientists had to understand traditional cultures on their own terms, rather than measure them against supposedly more advanced civilizations. Mead is credited with the statement: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does.”

The quotes from Douglass and Mead became the unofficial maxims of the Hofstra New Teachers Network as we struggle to become more effective teachers, build better schools, and have an impact on and influence the lives of our students. As a teacher, you will be involved in multiple struggles throughout your career. Some of these struggles are personal ones as you grapple with adult and professional responsibilities and define your goals and practice as a teacher. You will need to learn how to struggle with and for your students and to function as an ally and occasional prod to colleagues. You will have to decide whether to support or question union leadership and school systems, communities, and a society that do not always value and invest in the education of young people.

In [Chapter 5](#), I introduced you to Thomas Gradgrind, an industrialist who is the headmaster of a school in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854/1973). The book opens with Gradgrind explaining his philosophy of education. “Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!” (p. 47).

Dickens' purpose in the book was to satirize Gradgrind and expose the dreary schools and factories where children and workers were reduced to interchangeable numbers and virtually enslaved to machinery. Charlie Chaplin's movie *Modern Times* (1936) has a similar image of work in industrialized society.

The scariest thing about Gradgrind's school is how closely the caricature resembles the reality of that day. According to historian David Craig, “The first two chapters of the novel are an almost straight copy of the

teaching system in schools run by the two societies for educating the poor. In the Manchester Lancasterian School a thousand children were taught in one huge room, controlled by a kind of military drill with monitors and a monitor-general. Groups of facts, mechanically classified, were drummed in by methods that might have been meant to squash forever the children's urge to find out or understand anything for themselves" (Dickens and Craig, 1973, p. 22).

This "mechanical system of education" was developed by John Lancaster who also provided an "elaborate code of rewards and punishments" including "'the log', a piece of wood weighing four to six pounds, which was fixed to the neck of the child guilty of his (or her) first talking offence. More serious offences found their appropriate punishment in the Lancasterian code; handcuffs, the 'caravan,' the pillory and stocks, and 'the cage.' The latter was a sack or basket in which more serious offenders were suspended from the ceiling" (Dickens and Craig, 1973, p. 23). British public opinion solidly approved of this system, which was discussed and praised in the British House of Commons and in academic journals. However, Craig also cited a school inspector who complained that the "elaborate methods for destroying meaning" caused the children's "faculties" to be "stunted in their growth, and they sink into inert listlessness."

Despite these horrific images, the Lancaster-Gradgrind approach to pedagogy remains with us today. Although it continues to be satirized, for example, in the movie *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), it is also championed by prominent educators such as William Bennett (Bennett, Finn, & Cribb, 1996), Chester Finn (Finn & Ravitch, 1987), E. D. Hirsch (1987, 1996), as well as by proponents of school as a recurrent cycle of test preparation and high-stakes testing. Authors (I hate to call them educators) have written widely promoting lists of facts to be memorized by children at different age levels and in different grades, and have received government support for their proposals.

One argument for the Lancaster-Gradgrind approach to teaching (especially in schools for youth from immigrant, non-English-speaking, working-class, and poor families) is that the supposed ends, cultural literacy, higher scores on standardized exams, and better behaved children, justify the means of oppressive classrooms and the rote learning of decontextualized information. It is difficult to respond to their claims to a miracle cure for what ails education other than by saying that, based on my experience as a student and classroom teacher, I know it will not work. The French philosopher Albert Camus (1956/1991) offered a more intellectual way of looking at "reforms" that ignore means in the name of a higher good, a utopian ideal that will hopefully be achieved in the future. Camus argued that ends can never be known in advance, so suspension of judgment on means is never justified. In fact, the means that we experience are the only things we can evaluate.

I truly believe there is no magic pill that will make you a better teacher or simple solution that will improve education and our schools. Being an effective teacher means engaging in a long-term struggle to convince students that your goals for the class make sense and are worth examining and that your means (your approach to teaching or pedagogy) will treat them with dignity as thinking human beings and feeling members of a classroom community.

This chapter on struggle discusses what you should think about as you prepare to student teach or to start your first teaching position, with recommendations for new teachers from some hardened "veterans" from the

New Teachers Network. It includes online essays on educating students for twenty-first century jobs (E28) and the politics of education (E29, 30, 31, and 32). It concludes with an effort to recruit you to stand up for children, thoughts on how to not be “another brick in the wall,” and to enlist you in the struggle for a vision of how education can be a force for a more just society.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—SCRIPTED LEARNING

Scripted learning programs are being marketed by publishers, major institutions, and scholars. They are also being developed for online instruction that will supposedly eliminate the need for teachers. Some of these programs have been endorsed by school systems that see them as solutions to the problem of boosting scores on standardized exams in poor communities. Historian David Craig reported on a “model dialogue” between a monitor, rather than a teacher, and student from an 1840s training manual. I find it eerily reminiscent of contemporary scripted learning programs that are supposed to “teacher-proof” classroom instruction and provide easier means for assessing student learning (Dickens and Craig, 1973, p. 22).

Monitor: What have you been reading about?

Boy: Ruminating animals.

Monitor: Another name for ruminating?

Boy: Cud-chewing.

Monitor: What is the root of the word?

Boy: Rumen, the cud.

Monitor: You read in the lesson the enamel is disposed in crescent-shaped ridges. What is the enamel?

Boy: The hard, shining part of the tooth.

Monitor: What part of the tooth is it?

Boy: The covering of that part that is out of the jawbone.

Monitor: What do you mean by disposed?

Boy: Placed.

Monitor: The root?

Boy: Pono, I place.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does the “boy” demonstrate what he has learned?
2. What is missing from this boy's education?
3. Do you think these scripted learning programs have value? Explain.
4. Would you want to teach in a school that used this kind of model for teaching? Explain.
5. If you had children, would you want them in schools using this type of program? Explain.

Section A: What Should You Think About as You Prepare to Student Teach or Start Your First Teaching Position?

Some of you will find these suggestions a little silly, especially if you are a second-career teacher or someone who has significant work experience. However, I know that when I was in my early 20s these were very real issues for me as I struggled to figure out what it meant to be a responsible adult, worker, and professional.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—PREPARING TO TEACH

Question to Consider:

What are your concerns about yourself as you prepare to student teach or begin your first job as a teacher?

General Things to Think About

1. Why do you want to be a teacher?
2. What are your long-term career goals?
3. What things did you like as a student?
4. What things did you not like as a student?
5. What does it mean to be “in charge” of a class?
6. Why are you student teaching (or becoming a teacher)?
7. How can you experiment with different ways to teach?
8. How can you experiment with being a different “you”?
9. What does it mean to be a responsible worker?
10. What does it mean to be a responsible adult?
11. What does it mean to be a professional teacher?
12. How do you want to be related to your colleagues, your students, your supervisors, and the community?

Being Prepared for Work

1. How will I get up in the morning?
2. What will I wear?
3. How will I travel?
4. What materials will I need?
5. What will I need to learn?
6. When will I prepare?
7. How will I schedule my time at the school?
8. How will I get my own class work completed?
9. What is the layout of the school?
10. Who carries clout at the school—principal, assistant principal, superintendent, chairperson, school board, parents, colleagues, union, guidance counselor, dean?
11. When will I eat lunch? What will I eat?
12. What is available in the media and computer centers?

Preparing to Observe a Class and Teacher

1. Whom will I observe?
2. When will I observe?
3. Where do they want me to sit?
4. Do they want me to participate in any way?
5. What should I look for?
6. What is the teacher doing?
7. What are the students doing?
8. Are the teacher and the students having the “same” lesson?
9. What are the goals of the lesson?
10. Are the goals being achieved? How?
11. Do I want to teach this kind of lesson?

About the Students and Their Families

1. Who are the students—academically and by ethnicity and social class?
2. What is the community like?
3. Are students and staff from similar or different backgrounds? Is this a problem?
4. Are parents involved in the school? How?
5. Does the school have established procedures for contacting families?
6. Who are the resource people who can help you learn more about students?

Preparing to Teach

1. When will I begin to teach?
2. How many classes will I teach?
3. What will I teach?
4. What are my responsibilities for the class?
5. How much freedom to experiment do I have?
6. Do I know the curriculum?
7. How can I best prepare lessons?
8. Where can I get help?
9. What should I do if I am unhappy in my situation?
10. What should I do if I disagree with my supervisor?

Section B: What Will Student Teaching Be Like?

Many of the best veteran teachers I know cannot sleep the night before the first day of school. Their minds race with ideas and they worry whether they will be able to engage a new group of students. Part of the problem is that teachers keep getting older while students remain the same age. Usually, but not always, their anxiety eases after the first day. One trick that helps me get some rest is to keep a note pad by my bedside so I can write myself “urgent” messages.

Student teachers and new teachers, who do not have the knowledge that they have done it all before, are often plagued with apprehension, even when they are very good. Some stop eating, whereas others cannot stop. No matter how much field supervisors reassure them of their ability, they remain tense. In my experience, two things have aided them as they work through their nervousness—discussions with peers in seminars or teaching networks and keeping a journal. Both are vital elements of reflective practice.

I never was a big journal writer, but some student teachers find it helps them focus on what actually happened in their classes. They can vent their frustrations with individual students, whole classes, cooperating teachers and supervisors, the school system, or the world. They can also rethink their practice, decide on new strategies, engage in dialogues with authors, and enter debates over educational ideas.

Dawn Brigante kept a journal for a reflective practice seminar while she was an English student teacher. In it, she expressed many insecurities about her performance, but an inner strength allowed her to share them with other student teachers in the class and with this broader audience. In the journal entries reproduced here, Dawn compared her own experience and ideas with the ideas and experiences of authors she read in the teacher education program.

In the conclusion to her journal, Dawn wrote:

I was asked what I learned during my student teaching experience. I find that question difficult to answer because I learned so many things about the type of person and educator I am, about people in general, and about the students in my classes. With all of the knowledge I gained, I still have many unanswered questions, and some feelings I have not even formulated into questions yet. I hope to find some answers as I write this, and I hope that other answers, and new questions, become clearer to me when I am teaching.

I feel as though I have changed drastically as a person over the past months. I faced a challenge and I am proud of what I have accomplished. I survived all of those days when I thought that I could not last another moment or that I could not possibly face another class filled with teenagers. I learned that stress can do strange things to your body and I found out it is okay to scream in your car and to vent your frustrations, as long as your windows are closed and the stereo is playing loudly. If I am ever a cooperating teacher, I will try my hardest to be supportive of my student teachers and to offer constructive criticism that actually is constructive. I have learned that I do know a lot about literature, but that I have a lot to learn about everything else. I realize now that teaching is not an easy job; there is so much involved beyond what can be taught in a methods class.

Student teaching was by far the hardest thing I have ever had to do in my life, but also the most

rewarding. I gained valuable experience and I truly understand how difficult it is to teach a full day of classes. Having a support system in our seminar helped me gain insight into myself as a teacher and a person. The books and articles we read and wrote about provoked my thoughts about what I want to accomplish as a teacher and how to go about accomplishing it.

Other excerpts from Dawn's journal, which have been edited to remove some personal references, are online (C10). Dawn and I believe it remains true to the spirit of the original document.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—DAWN'S JOURNEY

Questions to Consider:

1. Which of Dawn's journal entries comes closest to addressing your concerns as you prepare to student teach or become a beginning teacher? Explain.
2. Dawn appears to arrive at a new level of understanding of material she read in her teacher education program as she teaches and reflects on her experiences in the classroom. Have you found the articles and books you have read about teaching useful? Explain. What do you think of Dawn's discoveries?
3. In your experience, is keeping a journal such as this one useful to you as an individual? Explain.
4. Write a letter to Dawn responding to her experiences and discussing your own. Email it to me at catajs@hofstra.edu and I will forward it to Dawn.

Section C: Recommendations for New Teachers

As a teacher you will attend many graduations and hear a number of speeches offering advice or challenging the audience to go off and remake the world. Perhaps the most famous speech of this kind is by a character named Polonius in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Polonius sends his son Laertes off to study at the university with the phrase, "To thy own self be true." Few people realize when they quote the speech that Polonius was a bit of a buffoon and Shakespeare was poking fun at his pomposity. Realizing the risks involved in final words of advice, Stephanie Hunte, Michael Pezone, and I want to offer some parting thoughts to young teachers as they voyage out into the "real" world.

Polonius's advice to Laertes by William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act I, Scene 3

Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.

Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel;

But do not dull thy palm with entertainment

Of each new-hatch'd, unfledged comrade. Beware

Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,

Bear't that the opposed may beware of thee. Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice;

Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment. Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,

But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy;

For the apparel oft proclaims the man,

And they in France of the best rank and station Are of a most select and generous chief in that. Neither a borrower nor a lender be;

For loan oft loses both itself and friend,

And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry. This above all: to thine own self be true,

And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Twelve End-of-My-First-Month Resolutions

by Stephanie Hunte

Stephanie Hunte found this list of resolutions in the teaching journal she kept during her first months of teaching. She confesses that she "broke" Resolution 2 within three weeks after she made it. Stephanie feels her journal and resolutions helped to keep her focused on her goals as a teacher during some very trying moments. She recommends the practice to all new teachers.

1. I have to learn patience.
2. I will no longer say shut up to any human being regardless of age or position.
3. I will plan at least one interesting lesson for each day.
4. I will use projects with all my classes.
5. I will have a more democratic classroom where kids can express themselves openly.
6. I will follow up on what I say because there is nothing worse than a lack of consistency.
7. I will be better organized because the paperwork is piling up.
8. I will include at least one hands-on activity per lesson.

9. I won't use the mundane factoid lessons I find in the textbook.
10. I will prepare lessons two days in advance, especially those that require photocopying.
11. I will not threaten students into learning by using coercive tactics.
12. I have to learn patience.

The Zen Teacher

by Michael Pezone

These are traditional Zen Buddhist stories that Michael Pezone, a mentor teacher in the New Teachers Network, shares with people starting the teacher education program. He gives each tale his own particular twist.

1. A huge, rough samurai once went to see a little monk, hoping to acquire the secrets of the universe. "Monk," he said, in a voice accustomed to instant obedience, "teach me about heaven and hell." The little monk looked up at the mighty warrior in silence. Then, after a moment, he said to the samurai with utter disdain, "Teach you about heaven and hell? I couldn't teach you about anything. You're dirty. You smell. Your blade is rusty. You're a disgrace, an embarrassment to the samurai class. Get out of my sight at once. I can't stand you!" The samurai was furious. He began to shake all over from the anger that raced through him. A red flush spread over his face; he was speechless with rage. Quickly, menacingly, he pulled out his sword and raised it above his head, preparing to slay the monk. "That's hell," said the little monk quietly. The samurai was overwhelmed. Stunned. The compassion and surrender of this little man who had offered his life to give this teaching about hell! He slowly lowered his sword, filled with gratitude, and for reasons he could not explain his heart became suddenly peaceful. "And that's heaven," said the monk softly. As a teacher, I ask myself: "Am I in heaven or am I in hell?"
2. There once was a monastery that was very strict. Following a vow of silence, no one was allowed to speak at all. But there was one exception to this rule. Every ten years, the monks were permitted to speak just two words. After spending his first ten years at the monastery, one monk went to the head monk. "It has been ten years," said the head monk. "What are the two words you would like to speak?" "Bed ... hard ..." said the monk. "I see," replied the head monk. Ten years later, the monk returned to the head monk's office. "It has been ten more years," said the head monk. "What are the two words you'd like to speak?" "Food ... stinks ..." said the monk. "I see," replied the head monk. Yet another ten years passed and the monk once again met with the head monk who asked, "What are your two words now, after these ten years?" "I... quit!" said the monk. "Well, I can see why," replied the head monk. "All you ever do is complain." As a teacher, I ask myself: "How will I spend my thirty years?"
3. Two monks were washing their bowls in the river when they noticed a scorpion that was drowning. One monk immediately scooped it up and set it upon the bank. In the process he was stung. He went back to washing his bowl and again the scorpion fell in. The monk saved the scorpion and was again stung. The other monk asked him, "Friend, why do you continue to save the scorpion when you know its nature is to sting?" "Because," the monk replied, "to save it is my nature." As a teacher, I ask myself: "Is it my nature to save the scorpion?"

Sports Metaphors

by Alan Singer

Teaching is a lot like basketball. It is like basketball because some days you cannot make a basket, but then suddenly you are "in the zone" and it seems like you will never miss a shot. Often that is how I feel in front of the room. Some teachers compare teaching to football. Football coaches like to compare their game with war, especially the need to plan short- and long-term strategies, the continuous movement of men and supplies, and the importance of field position. Football fans continually use the language of war—blitzes, end around plays, fighting in the trenches. If we put aside some of the violence, designing a game plan for football is a lot like planning to teach. But mostly teaching is like baseball.

In the spring of 2000, the defending champion New York Yankees were mired in a five-game losing streak. Their defense was sloppy, pitching was erratic, the team's hitters were cold, and a number of players were nursing minor injuries. Manager Joe Torre daily reminded anxious reporters and panicking fans that it was a "162-game season"; that in baseball "no one wins every game"; and that the team was

sound, would play through its problems, and would get back on the right track. As some commentators have noted, if you make an out two-thirds of the time, you are a candidate for the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

In numerous popular movies including *Field of Dreams* (1989), *The Natural* (1984), and *A League of Their Own* (1992), to name a few of my favorites, baseball is a metaphor for the ebb and flow of life. It is a long flowing season with a mixture of ups and downs.

I want to make a simpler analogy—baseball as a metaphor for teaching. Although you try to get a hit with every at bat, no one does. You will not win every lesson or every day. You need to think in terms of the full 180-day season: building, planning, and training for the long haul. Remember, if something doesn't go right, don't panic. There is time to figure it out and fix it.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—ADVICE TO TEACHERS

Questions to Consider:

1. Whose advice is more useful to you? Explain.
2. What questions would you like to ask Stephanie, Michael, Alan, or Polonius? Why?
3. Make a list, write a poem or speech, tell an allegory, or draw a picture with your advice to someone beginning a career as a secondary school teacher.

Section D: Not “Another Brick in the Wall”

In [Chapter 1](#), I introduced two songs, “Another Brick in the Wall (Part II)” by Pink Floyd and “Fight the Power” by Public Enemy. As I said at the time, this book is based on the premise that every teacher must make a decision: Will you “fight the power” or become “another brick in the wall” of an educational system that rewards some students, tracks many into limited options, and leaves others behind? I have tried to offer education students, student teachers, and beginning teachers a research- and theory-based approach to teaching that makes it possible to affect the lives of students and schools. I hope you decide not to become “another brick in the wall.”

A lot of fuss is made by politicians and some educators about poor test scores and the need to raise academic standards in the United States. But they rarely ask the key question: Why aren't all students doing well? More than a century ago, Emile Durkheim (1859/ 1951), a French sociologist, rejected the idea that education could be the force to solve society's problems. Durkheim believed that education could be “reformed only if society itself” was reformed. He argued that education was “only the image and reflection of society. It imitates and reproduces the latter; ... it does not create it” (pp. 372–373).

I think Durkheim is saying that we have the schools we have, not because teachers are bad or there is something wrong with children or their parents, but because it serves the interests of powerful forces in our society not to educate some children and to have teachers, parents, and children blame each other for the problems. If Durkheim is correct, a society has the school system it deserves. Denouncing the poor quality of education is like blaming a mirror because you do not like your reflection.

Blaming schools, while exempting our social system from scrutiny, allows those who support the status quo to propose relatively inexpensive, but ultimately ineffective, solutions to the problems affecting education. Instead of spending money to lower class size; build new, safe, welcoming schools for all children; enhance the development of teachers throughout their careers; and support research on promoting learning, they vote to raise standards, reshuffle curriculum content, create new tests, and demand foolproof teacher certification criteria. Few people ask what will happen in communities in which 80% of the students who complete high school are unable to earn diplomas. Instead, to punish these students for their failure, because failure is by definition their own fault, there is a movement to bar four-year public colleges from providing them with remedial classes.

The first step in improving education is to recognize that the problems plaguing schools are rooted in the way our society is organized. The United States does not have a uniform school system that educates all children. It provides elite private schools for the children of the privileged, while some kids sit in overcrowded classrooms in crumbling buildings. Teachers need to ask, what kind of country is it where children who already have computers at home are the ones most likely to have access to them in school? I want every child in the United States to have the same education provided in the priciest private schools or in the most affluent suburban districts.

I believe there are still real possibilities for improving public education. American educational ideology is inconsistent, valuing individualism, competition, and materialism, but also citizenship, democracy, and equality. Teachers can take advantage of this inconsistency to create democratic classroom communities where

students learn to think critically, provide leadership, and care about others. For me, the crucial players in the struggle to transform schools (and society) are our students. If they experience concern and democracy in schools and learn to think critically about the world, they can become powerful agents for change. It is our job as teachers, a very difficult job, to find ways to help them.

In addition, teachers can build on the strengths of students while acknowledging weaknesses. Strategies to promote the love of learning must take both into account. Poverty, alienation, and discrimination have had a devastating impact on many communities in the United States. What young person could emerge out of these communities, and certainly out of many of our public schools, without some educational deficits? This is why teachers cannot ignore the social context of learning. As a high school teacher, I tried to connect with every student in the room, even when I realized it was not always possible; there were too many complicating factors in the lives of my students. What kept me going may have been obstinacy, but it was also the realization that I could not predict which students would respond, so the only way I could reach some of the students was to try to reach every one of them.

I think that politicians and educators made a strategic error in their campaign for higher educational standards, and that their mistake opens up space for legal challenges to unequal school funding and for organizing the public to fight for a more equitable school system and society. State legislatures and courts generally endorse school systems that permit social inequality. National and state standards, by raising the minimum for acceptable school performance and by providing a new definition of a “sound basic education,” make every school system subject to legal review. Teachers, parents, and our students can be major contributors to campaigns that insist that our school systems obey the law.

Many new teachers are frightened of being perceived as activists or even of being seen as having a point of view. Some argue that they will wait until they have tenure before they express their views. However, my experience is that if you are afraid to speak out before you have tenure, you will not speak out later. School districts always have treats to offer or withhold, better rooms and equipment, advanced placement classes, extracurricular pay, or administrative assignments, so there is always another reason to remain silent.

As a teacher, you will have to decide whether you are going to remain silent; join those who blame parents, children, and other teachers; or become involved in the struggle to educate all children. None of us is born immune from the fear of losing a job or the prejudices that infect our society. But if teachers face up to who we are and examine our society, attitudes, and behavior with open eyes, we can overcome our limitations and help to change the world.

Section E: My Name Is Alan Singer and I Am Here to Recruit You

Some of you have seen the movie *Milk* (2008). It is about Harvey Milk, a gay activist in San Francisco, who tells audiences “My name is Harvey Milk and I am here to recruit you!” It is a powerful line from a powerful movie. At another point in the movie Harvey Milk says, “Without hope life is not worth living—you’ve got to give them hope.” Well, my name is Alan Singer and I am here to recruit you! Not only do I want to recruit you to become a teacher, but I want to share with you my hope for the future.

Forty years ago, I was not much different than many of you are now. I grew up in a working-class community in the Bronx within walking distance of Yankee Stadium. Neither of my parents went to college, but I was always considered “college material.” I attended one of New York City’s academically selective public high schools, where I was a mediocre student. On the relatively rare occasions when I liked a teacher or a subject, I usually did well. More often, I just got by.

I started college at the City College of New York (CCNY) in September 1967 partly because it was the thing to do after high school, partly because my parents said it would provide me with a “profession” and a middle-class standard of living, and partly because college meant a deferment from the war in Vietnam. When I thought about the future, I considered becoming a research scientist or maybe a lawyer. I never imagined myself becoming a secondary school teacher. How could I? I did not like high school the first time.

The years 1967–1971 were exciting times at CCNY and in the United States. Demonstrators protested against U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam. The African American community debated integration vs. separation. Women and gays and lesbians were challenging second-class citizenship. Students were demanding the right to participate in the college decision-making process. In December 1967, I was arrested in a protest at Whitehall Street, the New York City draft induction center immortalized by Arlo Guthrie in the ballad “Alice’s Restaurant.” I was charged with “obstructing pedestrian traffic” by standing on the sidewalk. The charges were later dropped. As a result of my arrest, which was unplanned, I emerged as a radical student leader and was elected to the student government.

My freshman, sophomore, and junior years were spent planning and protesting, working in a cafeteria and as a taxi cab driver, traveling, and only occasionally attending classes. At the start of my junior year, I began to think about what I would do after I finished college. My long-term plan was to become a revolutionary. My short-term plan was to be employable. My father persuaded me to get my teaching credentials as a back-up plan.

At some point, and I am not sure when, I started to become a serious student. If I was going to change the world, I had to understand it. I began to read history, study, do research, and think about the world. I became a member of the United Community Centers, a community organizing group based in the working-class, largely minority community of East New York, Brooklyn. At the center, we worked with community youth, knocked on doors in the public housing projects raising money and discussing our ideas, distributed a community newspaper, organized people to participate in broader social movements, and operated a summer “sleep-away” camp. I spent my next five summers working in camp as a counselor, bus driver, and maintenance worker, and remained active in the center for over 30 years.

The education program at CCNY will surprise no one. After a series of disagreements between us in class, my first education professor said I should never become a teacher and recommended that I drop out of the program. The history of education professor lectured about things those who remained awake considered irrelevant. The educational psychology professor spent all of his time discussing experiments with pigeons and geese rather than discussing how children learn. The social studies methods teacher was especially disappointing. His specialty was operating outdated audiovisual equipment, so we had workshops on each machine. At the end of his class, I swore I would never use any of them, even if it meant permanent unemployment.

Because of my reputation at City College as a troublemaker, I was exiled to student teach in an “undesirable” junior high school in the south Bronx. My cooperating teacher was starting her second year as a teacher. She was nice to the students, but had not yet learned how to teach or organize a class. An adjunct in the School of Education was assigned to observe me three times.

My most memorable lesson as a student teacher was a mock demonstration in the classroom. We were studying Martin Luther's 95 theses. I met the students at the door and handed them flyers inviting them to come to a rally protesting against the injustices of the Roman Catholic Church. We yelled, sang protest songs, evaluated Martin Luther's demands, and then discussed similarities between protests against the authority of the Catholic Church in 1517 and against U.S. policy in Vietnam in 1971.

The draft remained a problem until the fall of 1971, when the law authorizing military conscription expired and the United States started its experiment with an all-volunteer army. My friends and I had decided that if we were drafted we would organize against the war in Vietnam from inside the military. I was terrified of this prospect and was tremendously relieved not to have to go into the army.

Although I liked student teaching, I still did not plan to become a teacher. An unanticipated result of my changed attitude toward studying was that I was accepted into the U.S. history doctoral program at Rutgers University and offered a teaching assistantship. Suddenly I was in graduate school and was going to be both a scholar and a revolutionary. During the next few years, I learned that coffee house intellectualizing, academic revolutionary theorizing, and long lonely hours of library research were not all that appealing. What I liked most was teaching history classes. When I completed my coursework and passed my written and oral exams, I resigned my assistantship and became a substitute teacher in a middle school in Brooklyn. Within a few months, I had my own Language Arts and Reading program, but then in 1975 New York City went bankrupt and thousands of teachers were laid off. My name was placed on a list that remained frozen until 1978.

In the fall of 1978, a high school contacted me and said I had been appointed to work there. The school that I was assigned to had serious academic, discipline, and attendance problems, and my first few years as a teacher were very hard. Many teenagers from low-income public housing projects with high crime and unemployment rates were zoned into the school. Attendance was erratic, fighting was frequent, and teachers were often just as glad when the kids did not show up.

But I wanted to be a good teacher and I worked hard at it. I had students in my tenth-grade economics class analyze the Board of Education budget report. We prepared our own recommendations, and then we testified at government budget hearings. The students were so excited that they organized a school club so

they could remain involved with public issues when they were no longer in my class. Two years later, the club helped organize a rally against educational budget cuts at New York City Hall that involved approximately 5,000 people.

My proudest moments as a teacher were when my students led a successful campaign for condom availability in the high school, when I read an article in the newspaper about a former student who had become a lawyer and an activist defending the rights of immigrants in the South Asian community in Queens, New York, and when a former student, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic who could barely speak English when I knew him, was interviewed on television as the leader of the New York City livery cab drivers' union.

Because of my beliefs, I am a strong supporter of state and national learning standards that encourage document-based instruction; the ability of students to locate, organize, and present information; critical thinking; and the promotion of literacy in the content area subjects.

I said at the start that I wanted to recruit you. I want to recruit you to two things. I would like you to consider becoming a teacher. It is a profession where you can change people's lives. I also want you to consider becoming a political activist with a commitment to social justice.

Because of the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States in 2008, there was a lot of talk that the civil rights movement had finally been successfully completed. As an activist, a teacher, and a historian, I disagree.

The African American Civil Rights Movement in the United States was a major world historic event that motivated people to fight for social justice in this country and others. Its activism, ideology, and achievements contributed to the women's rights movement, the gay and lesbian rights movement, the struggle for immigrant rights, and the anti-war movement in this country. It inspired anti-Apartheid activists in South Africa and national liberation movements in third-world countries.

In many ways, I am a product of the civil rights movement. I did not march in 1963, I was only 13 years old, but I did march at the twentieth anniversary celebration in Washington, D.C., in 1983, the fiftieth anniversary celebration in 2013, and at many other protests demanding an end to imperialist war, equality for all citizens, immigrant rights, and social justice.

The traditional myth about the civil rights movement, the one that is taught in schools and promoted by politicians and the national media, is that Rosa Parks sat down, Martin Luther King stood up, and somehow the whole world changed. The new myth adds the legend of Barack Obama to the equation.

But the real story is that the civil rights movement was a mass democratic movement to expand human equality and guarantee citizenship rights for Black Americans. While some individual activists stood out, it involved hundreds of thousands of people, including many White people, who could not abide the U.S. history of racial oppression dating back to slavery days. It is worth noting that many of the Whites involved in the civil rights movement were radicals who had been involved in earlier protest movements, particularly the building of the labor movement, and a disproportionate number were Jews who had their own experience with racism and bigotry.

King and Parks played crucial and symbolic roles in the civil rights movement, but so did Thurgood Marshall, Myles Horton, Fanny Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, A. Philip Randolph, Walther Reuther, Medger Evers, John Lewis, Bayard Rustin, Pete Seeger, Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson, as well as activists who were critics of racial integration and nonviolent civil disobedience such as Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, and the Black Panthers.

The stories of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King have been sanitized to rob them of their radicalism and power. Rosa Parks was not a little old lady who sat down in the White only section of the bus because she was tired. She was a trained organizer, a graduate of the Highlander School where she studied civil disobedience and social movements, and a leader of the Montgomery, Alabama, NAACP. She made a conscious choice to break an unjust law in order to provoke a response and promote a movement for social change. And she wasn't even that old when she was arrested. She was only 42 when she refused to change her seat and made history.

Martin Luther King, although you would never know it from the birthday celebrations and the monument in Washington, D.C., challenged the war in Vietnam, U.S. imperialism, and laws that victimized working people and the poor, not just racial discrimination. When he was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, he was helping organize a sanitation workers union. If Dr. King had not been assassinated, but had lived to become an old radical activist who constantly questioned American policy, I suspect he would never have become so venerated. It is better for a country to have heroes who are dead, because they cannot make embarrassing statements opposing continuing injustice and unnecessary wars.

I believe the United States needs a new social movement, a movement for social justice—and that is the movement I am recruiting you to join. I am not recruiting you to a particular ideology, political program, or point of view. The world is constantly changing—you are constantly chang-ing—and it would be foolish to pigeonhole you to support a particular cause for the rest of your lives. What I am recruiting you for is to make a commitment to three ways of looking at the world. I want you to be critical thinkers, to reject received truths, and to demand the right to evaluate evidence and underlying ideas. I am recruiting you to become thinking human beings.

I am also recruiting you to become compassionate human beings with respect for diversity. You need to be concerned with the needs of others who share this planet with us, to recognize their humanity, and to understand that they want the same things that you do for themselves and their families—adequate food and housing, decent education and medical care, and hope for the future. You also need to understand just because someone does not live your way, practice your religion, or make the same choices that you make, does not mean they are wrong or less than you.

And finally, I am recruiting you to a life of civic activism—as full participants in shaping the future of a democratic society that supposedly values an interchange of ideas and an open expression of disagreement.

At the 2004 Republican national convention in New York City, I was marching with a group of teachers in protest against the war in Iraq. After we had been standing in one place for a while, a young social studies teacher asked me how long we had been marching. I thought for a few seconds and responded “forty years.” She laughed and said, “I mean really.” “Forty years,” I said, “I’ve been marching for forty years.” I invite you all to march with me.

It is time for a new social movement in the United States—a movement for social justice that ensures political, social, and economic rights for all people, citizens and non-citizens, Americans and everybody else—and I am here to recruit you.

During the 1930s workers organizing labor unions sang: “You got to go down and join the union, you got to join it for yourself, nobody here can join it for you, you got to go down and join the union for yourself.” You have to decide to be an activist for social justice committed to full participation in decision making in a democratic society for yourself.

In his last speech, Reverend Martin Luther King told his audience: “We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn’t matter with me now, because I’ve been to the mountaintop ... I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!” Martin Luther King did not tell what the promised land would look like, but as a lifetime social activist I am sure that he knew.

Some of you may remember the silly children’s song about the bear who went over the mountain to see what he could see. On the other side, he saw another mountain. Each time the bear climbed the mountain, he found another mountain that had to be climbed. Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement climbed their mountain. It is time for you to start climbing yours.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a difficult but wondrous task in front of us. Get ready. Get set. Go out and teach.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION—SHOULD TEACHERS BE NEUTRAL?

In their book, *We Make the Road by Walking* (1990, p. 102), Myles Horton and Paulo Freire discuss the question of whether it is possible or desirable for teachers to be “neutral” in their classrooms. Freire asks, “A biology teacher must know biology, but is it possible just to teach biology? What I want to know is whether it is possible to teach biology without discussing social conditions.”

Horton believes, “There’s no right I could claim that anybody else in the world can’t claim, and I have to fight for their exercising that right just like I have to fight for my own. That doesn’t mean I have to impose my ideas on people, but it means I have a responsibility to provide whatever light I can on the subject and share my ideas with people.”

Questions to Consider:

1. In your opinion, is it possible or desirable for teachers to be neutral on controversial issues?
2. Is it possible for teachers to express opinions without proselytizing and while respecting the opinions of their students?

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