

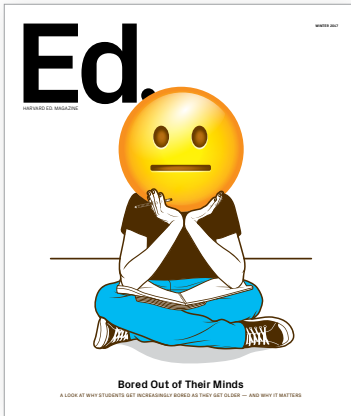
# Ed.

HARVARD ED. MAGAZINE



## Bored Out of Their Minds

A LOOK AT WHY STUDENTS GET INCREASINGLY BORED AS THEY GET OLDER — AND WHY IT MATTERS



WINTER 2017 □ ISSUE NO 156

**Editor in Chief**

Lory Hough  
LORY\_HOUGH@HARVARD.EDU

**Creative Director, Ed.**

Patrick Mitchell  
MODUS OPERANDI DESIGN  
WWW.MODUSOP.NET

**Assistant Dean of Communications**

Michael Rodman  
MICHAEL\_RODMAN@HARVARD.EDU

**Contributing Writers**

Andrew Bauld, Ed.M.'16  
Zachary Jason  
Brendan Pelsue

**Illustrators**

Greg Clarke  
Todd Detwiler  
Ben Kirchner  
Riccardo Vecchio

**Photographers**

Jill Anderson  
Jesse Burke  
Jonathan Kozowyk  
Tim Llewellyn  
Ekaterina Smirnova

**Copy Editors**

Marin Jorgensen  
Abigail Mieko Vargus

**POSTMASTER**

Send address changes to:  
Harvard Graduate School of Education  
Office of Communications  
13 Appian Way  
Cambridge, MA 02138

© 2017 by the President and Fellows of  
Harvard College. *Harvard Ed.* magazine is  
published three times a year.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.



# Contents

Winter 2017



## Intro.

4

**NEWS + NOTES FROM APPIAN WAY**

Tagging kids content, p. 4 □ Helping NASA and PBS create better curriculum for teachers, p. 8 □ The Making of Lecturer Lee Teitel, Ed.D.'88, p. 10 □ CEPR's Proving Ground gets data to districts faster, p. 12 □ Study Skills: Lizzie Moore, p. 13 □ Frisbee life skills, p. 14 □ Kernel-sized lessons for social-emotional learning, p. 15 □ On My Bookshelf with Assistant Professor Dana McCoy, p. 16 □ AND MORE!

GREG CLARKE



## Features

18

### Bored Out of Their Minds

A look at why students get increasingly bored as they get older — and why it matters.

STORY BY ZACHARY JASON



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP: TIM LLEWELLYN; JONATHAN KOZOWYK; TBB

34

### Rethink the Gap

Do alternative gap-year programs have lessons for traditional high schools and colleges?

STORY BY BRENDAN PELSUE

## Departments

CONVO. — READER FEEDBACK . . . . . 2  
 GRAD. — ALUMNI NEWS + NOTES . . . . . 43  
 CAMPAIGN . . . . . 49



26

### No More Sink the Sub

What if you brought in a musician or farmer instead of a worksheet when a teacher was out for the day?

STORY BY LORY HOUGH

# Convo.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION: SEND YOUR COMMENTS TO [LETTERS@GSE.HARVARD.EDU](mailto:LETTERS@GSE.HARVARD.EDU)



**1** The piece by [JESSICA LANDER, ED.M.'15](#), “Do the Right Thing. (But How?),” pulled in the most comments from our fall 2016 issue, most overwhelmingly positive, with accolades like “wonderful essay” and “what an article!” Another reader said he was “moved and inspired.” Anne Sturgis Watt acknowledged that **solving ethical dilemmas is one of the toughest aspects of teaching.** “Sounds simple but it ain’t easy,” she wrote. Lori Damon added, “Current public school policy for handling ‘problem’ students in the classroom is most often punitive, which exacerbates the situation and humiliates the student. I applaud Ms. Lander for protecting her students from this outcome and instead treating problems as springboards for learning and growing. The impact of her approach is positive and has lasting effects on her students well beyond the classroom. The true violation here is that Ms. Lander stands alone. Public school policy on this topic is shortsighted and needs to change.”



**2** Reader [JJ \(JEN\) JOHNSON, ED.M.'01](#), an author of young adult novels, wrote to tell us she read the story “Too Much on Their Plates” to her family, and they playfully found a way to re-jigger the content. **“I love this, especially the PDF part,”** she wrote, referring to three things that [DENISE POPE, ED.M.'89](#), author of *Overloaded and Underprepared*, thinks are essential for the well-being of students: playtime, downtime, and family time. When Johnson read the piece to her family, “they voted for PDF to be PFD, as in ‘Personal Flotation Device.’ Sharing!”



**3** The short piece “Elephant, Love” from the summer 2016 issue continues to get shares and comments on Facebook. For reader Michelle DeGondea Amato, it even triggered a memory from childhood. “I must read this,” she wrote. “When I was a child, probably about two or three, during the Christmas pageant at a New Jersey mall, one year an attraction was riding a baby elephant. I, being a well-loved grandchild, had the ‘opportunity’ to ride that baby elephant. It impressed me and affected my relationship with elephants for the rest of my life. I remember very little about those years, but I clearly remember that elephant and especially her little eyes that looked like they were crying. **Since learning about the emotional intelligence of elephants and their family bonds, I am haunted by that experience.** I hope that baby elephant has fared as well as I have to this point. He or she would be just a few years younger than me. Thanks for sharing.”

## WHAT HE SAID

If you want to know Dean Ryan’s thoughts on all things education, as well as other important subjects like baseball and running, follow him on Twitter [@deanryan](https://twitter.com/deanryan).

## Past Tense

As readers of the magazine know, the school announced last summer that it was starting a new center focused on early childhood education called the Saul Zaentz Early Childhood Education Initiative. Designed to get all kids kindergarten ready, the initiative includes, among other things, a large-scale study of 3-year-olds that will follow for five years their development in relation to their preschool education. Designed to be a go-to place for cutting-edge science about early childhood practices and strategies, the initiative will also create professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators, as well as a fellowship program for incoming Ed School master’s and Doctor of Education Leadership students.

Given the announcement of the new initiative, we found this letter from a 1967 issue of *Ed.* magazine interesting and, oddly, also very timely. Written by [RICHARD POLSKY, M.A.T.'56](#), in response to two first-person essays in the magazine’s summer 1965 issue by student teachers, the letter urges educators to focus more on children’s early years. As Polsky wrote:

“Despite mounting evidence (much of it a result of work done by the universities themselves) that the first five years of a child’s life are educationally the most important ones, many of our schools



of education have nonexistent or weak programs for the training of teachers for these young children. Our experience as educators should teach us that if a child does not get a wholesome start educationally in his first five years of life, the remedial programs introduced during the later years will do little good.

“It is worth noting that when the national director of Project Head Start was chosen, a pediatrician rather than an educator was selected. It is also clear that some of our most respected educators are turning to private industry as a source of creative American educational leadership.”

## CONNECT WITH ED.



[TWITTER.COM/HGSE](https://twitter.com/HGSE)



[HARVARDEDUCATION.TUMBLR.COM](https://www.tumblr.com/harvardeducation)



[FACEBOOK.COM/HARVARDEDUCATION](https://www.facebook.com/HARVARDEDUCATION)



[ISSUU.COM/HARVARDEDUCATION](https://www.issuu.com/HARVARDEDUCATION)



[YOUTUBE.COM/HARVARDEDUCATION](https://www.youtube.com/HARVARDEDUCATION)



[MEDIUM.COM/@HARVARDEDUCATION](https://medium.com/@HARVARDEDUCATION)



[INSTAGRAM.COM/HARVARDEDUCATION](https://www.instagram.com/HARVARDEDUCATION)



[LETTERS@GSE.HARVARD.EDU](mailto:LETTERS@GSE.HARVARD.EDU)

## Behind the Story

Lory Hough, Editor in Chief



Think back on your time in school. Remember how excited you felt in first grade when, using crayons and paper, you turned your name into an alien and your creation was hung on the bulletin board outside the classroom. Flash forward to high school when you constantly watched the clock, wondering when the dismissal bell was finally going to ring. How does this progression from bouncy 6-year-old to bored 16-year-old happen in school? As Dean Jim Ryan noticed with his own kids when he asked each day how school was, the flat response — “boring” — increased as they got older. “Something about the contrast among my kids,” he wrote in his *Education Week* blog, “finally snapped me out of my complacency about boredom.” He began to wonder if “boredom ought to be considered much more seriously when thinking about ways to improve student outcomes.” With this in mind, we decided to tackle the issue in our cover story, “Bored out of Their Minds.” I hope it gets you thinking and keeps you, well, not bored.

READ DEAN RYAN’S BOREDOM PIECE AT [GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS](https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ed/extras)

# Intro.

NEWS + NOTES FROM APPIAN WAY



## Tagging Twilight Sparkle

(OR, WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU GET  
A JOB WATCHING TV ALL DAY)

STORY BY LORY HOUGH

At first, the babysitter didn't know what to make of her new boss spending hours obsessively analyzing cartoons all day. Things were especially questionable when **TRACY ELIZABETH, ED.M.'10, ED.D.'17**, watched the same episode of *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic* over and over and over again.

"I spent more than five hours in a single afternoon watching *Twilight Sparkle*, the main unicorn pony, figure out how to protect her friends from a feared pony named Nightmare Moon," Elizabeth says.

The sitter, as it turns out, didn't have anything to worry about: Elizabeth had just started her new job with Netflix as the lead content tagger for children's media and *had* to spend hours watching kids' shows and movies and then decide how to tag, or code, the content.

"The tags help Netflix identify, in nuanced detail, what content exists in the shows," she says. "We then categorize the shows based on a combination of tags that they have in common" — tags like "goriness" and "smoking," or, in the case of *My Little Pony*, possible warm-hearted themes of friendship. Netflix uses the tags to create the "because you watched..." or "top picks for..." categories on a subscriber's main page.

For adults looking to watch a new show or series, these recommendations can be fun, Elizabeth says. But for kids, detailed tagging has a second, more important function.

"If Netflix suggests that a kid watch a high-violence show, that's a problem," she says. "We have to be a gatekeeper for what is fed into their queue." (Although, Elizabeth adds, this has nothing

to do with censorship or cyber parenting. It's still up to parents and families to decide what content is most suitable.) "I always think of myself as a protector of children and that young viewers have a team watching out for them, not only for what they enjoy, but what's developmentally appropriate."

That could be why the "violence" tag is probably considered the most when it comes to evaluating kids' shows. (Some of the least used are "horror," "political friction," and "medical research," she says.)

"Not all kids' shows contain violent themes, yet it is important for taggers to evaluate all shows to determine if violence does exist," she says. "If there is violence, we measure the magnitude of the violent acts and the type of violence in that show. For example, there is a difference between a show like *Word Party*, which is educational in tone and contains no violence, to *Dinotrux*, which has some high-energy action where an animated machine may get banged up."

Elizabeth says there are less obvious tags used for kids' shows, including "perilous situations" and "strong female lead" — the latter one of her favorites.

"We use this to identify when a lead protagonist in the show is female. This lets us highlight shows that may appeal to youth who wish for strong women or girl role models in their lives," she says. "I'm inspired by the 'strong female lead' tag because I can see a trend in the newer media content that is being produced for youth," tilting toward more female characters who are strong leaders and who succeed at whatever they're doing.

With all of this behind-the-scenes knowledge of Netflix content, Elizabeth says it's not uncommon for friends with kids to ask her for show recommendations.

"I can't gush enough about how much I love *Project Mc2* for its girl empowerment and STEAM education. Also, as a huge Beatles fan, I adore *Beat Bugs* for families with kids who are into music," she says. "And, while it's made for adults, *Stranger Things* is an addicting blast from the past. It stars a cast of tweens whose characters deftly model problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills while eerie supernatural events increasingly complicate their lives."

Elizabeth acknowledges that she could talk about her new job endlessly. "Can you tell I love Netflix content? It's the only job in the world where when I clock off, I still tune in."

WISE WORDS

## "It's like drinking from a hose."

**Eric Shed**, director of the Harvard Teacher Fellows Program, addressing how unprepared new teachers often feel once they leave college and start to teach in an actual classroom. (*chalkbeat*)



## It's Ancient History

HOW ONE ALUM'S EARLY INTEREST IN EARLY EGYPT TURNED INTO A BOOK SERIES

STORY BY LORY HOUGH

**W**HEN YOUR grandfather comes to your school in the first grade, after a trip to Egypt, and shows your class the dried-up face of an unwrapped mummy, it's not surprising that an interest in all-things Tut and tomb would develop.

For **BILL MEYER, ED.M.'04**, this meant leading his third-grade class two years later in a demo mummification of dolls. After college, he started teaching high school history, including sections on Ancient Egypt. More recently, Meyer started writing about that time period with *Horace j. Edwards and the Time Keepers*, his middle school adventure series set partially along the Nile. This April, the second book in the series comes out.

He remembers the first time he shared the idea for the book series with his wife. They were in a New York City taxicab.

"I told her that I had this idea for a kid who time travels

through a tree in the backyard of his grandparents' farm and goes back and meets King Tut," Meyer says, describing what would become the plot of his first book in the series, *The Secret of the Scarab Beetle*. "When we got out of the cab, she turned to me and said, 'Don't tell anyone else about this idea. It's good.' It was really funny because she was worried that the cab driver was going to steal the idea as well."

At the time, Meyer was getting his Ph.D. at New York University and teaching, so he had no extra time to take a writing class or find other writers to workshop his manuscript. Instead, he had to dig in, rely on friends to give feedback, and lean heavily on his strength: knowing the history of that time and place.

"So much of the inspiration for this story is based on historical facts. The characters, the places, the names, and even many of the

objects are real," he says. "There's nothing by chance." The names in particular have meaning. Horace, the series' main character, for example, was named, in part, after a stuffed animal that Meyer lugged around as a kid.

"When I started working on the story, I asked my mom about it. She said yes, it was Horace the Hippo. Horace is also an Egyptian god and one of the most famous residents in Niles, Michigan," the real-life town where the book is set. That famous resident, Horace Dodge, was married to Anna Dodge, the name Meyer used for the protagonist's best friend. Mr. Petrie, the teacher in the book, is based on the famous Egyptologist Flinders Petrie.

This fall, Meyer continued with the book tour for the first book, which included classroom visits where he read chapters to students and offered related book content that he created, like a

glossary and in-depth curriculum guide, to teachers. He also wrapped up the writing on his second book in the series — something that consumed far fewer hours this time around.

"The first book took five years to write, the second, five months," he says. With round one, "I had to learn how to write. I gave it to people to read. I thought I was going to have to self-publish, then an agent saw it and said, 'Don't self-publish.'" Then it took a year to get it picked up and 18 months of back and forth and reworking," he says. "It was exciting, but it was definitely baptism by fire."



TO ACCESS THE TEACHING GUIDE, TIMELINE, AND GLOSSARY: [HORACE-ANDTHETIMEKEEPERS.COM](http://HORACE-ANDTHETIMEKEEPERS.COM)

TO READ THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE *SECRET OF THE SCARAB BEETLE*: [HORACEANDTHETIMEKEEPERS.COM](http://HORACEANDTHETIMEKEEPERS.COM)

## BLOG WORTHY

A sampling of Ed School blogs worth reading



1

### Professor Tom Kane

Connect to Kane's blogs for *EducationNext* and *Brookings*.

[educationnext.org/author/tkane/](http://educationnext.org/author/tkane/)  
[brookings.edu/experts/thomas-j-kane/](http://brookings.edu/experts/thomas-j-kane/)

2

### Associate Professor Karen Brennan

Check out Brennan's ScratchEd blog page, which includes Scratch projects she's created and studios she's curated.

[scratch.mit.edu/users/karenb/](http://scratch.mit.edu/users/karenb/)

3

### Dean James Ryan

From his *Education Week* blog, *Making the Case*, Ryan asks what he considers to be the key questions at the heart of current education debates.

[hgse.me/JamesRyanBlog](http://hgse.me/JamesRyanBlog)



Jenny Kostka, a physics and astronomy teacher at South Shore Charter Public School in Norwell, Massachusetts, is bringing NASA resources to her classroom.

Photograph by Jesse Burke

# Mission Control, This Is Your Teacher Speaking

NASA AND PBS PARTNER WITH THOSE ON THE FRONT LINE OF TEACHING TO MAKE SCIENCE CURRICULUM MORE USEFUL

STORY BY [ANDREW BAULD, ED.M.'16](#)

**A**S ODD AS IT sounds, the students in Jenny Kostka's high school physics class were expecting an out-of-this-world announcement from their teacher when they started school this part September. And they were almost right.

"The first day, students came up to say they were really excited," [KOSTKA, ED.M.'15](#), says. "They saw the word NASA on the school's web page and thought I might be going to Mars." While their teacher won't be traveling to a distant planet any time soon, Kostka will be bringing outer space to her students, thanks to a new partnership between NASA and WGBH, Boston's PBS station.

Kostka was selected as one of a team of 50 K-12 teachers to serve as advisers for a project called Bringing the Universe to America's Classrooms, which will provide access to all of NASA's available online data, ranging from interstellar measurements of electromagnetism to 3-D models of the Cassini spacecraft, including new curriculum material that Kostka and the other teacher advisers are helping to develop.

Kostka had a chance at the end of last school year to look at examples of what the project had already created. This fall she served on teacher focus groups while also designing and piloting new curriculum in her classroom, which she will continue doing through-

out the rest of the school year. The teaching tools and resources, which will eventually be offered free to anyone, are focused on STEM topics in Earth, space, and physical sciences.

From the beginning, teacher involvement was critical to WGBH's proposal to NASA in developing the curriculum. Kostka says she is excited to be part of the adviser team because they can help shape material so that it's actually useful for teachers.

"Sometimes you see resources meant for teachers and think, I can't really see teachers using this," Kostka says. "Lots of times teachers want to make something their own; they don't want a full lesson plan. I don't expect to see full, scripted lesson plans [from NASA]. This curriculum will be much more flexible, which a lot of teachers will appreciate."

Kostka has been teaching astronomy and physics for more than a decade, but her passion for science goes beyond the lab or the classroom.

"It makes you look at the world in a different way if you really understand how things work," she says. "If you're driving down the highway, and you think the pavement is wet on a hot sunny day, you know why. It jumps out at you in everyday life all the time."

This enthusiasm for science was just one of the qualities that made Kostka stand out in a pool of

650 applications. A panel of judges selected candidates through a blind admission process. Those selected were noted for their willingness to innovate in the classroom and their enthusiasm for digital resources, says Denise Olson, senior marketing manager for education at WGBH, all traits that Kostka possessed.

"What stood out for us about Jenny was the fact that she teaches astronomy and is already familiar with NASA resources, as well as her educational technology background," Olson says.

Before this project, Kostka had already begun to use more technology and digital resources in her classrooms. But she credits her time as a member of the Technology, Innovation, and Education cohort in driving her thinking about how to make those resources more creative and student driven.

"The classes I focused on [at Harvard] were about using things more creatively in the classroom and getting students to create using digital media," Kostka says. "I'll try and make that a priority to make these [NASA] resources a vehicle for creation for students and not just a digital worksheet."

**ANDREW BAULD, ED.M.'16**, IS A WRITER CURRENTLY LIVING IN CHICAGO.



TO LEARN MORE: [WGBHTEACHERADVISORS.ORG/TEACHER-ADVISORS.HTML](http://WGBHTEACHERADVISORS.ORG/TEACHER-ADVISORS.HTML)

## THE MAKING OF

## Lecturer Lee Teitel

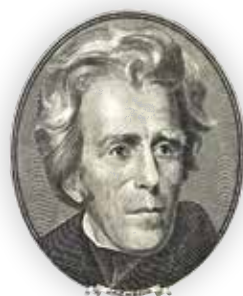
It's clear, looking back at the career of **LEE TEITEL, ED.D.'88**, that Teitel has never shied away from challenges. As a kid, when his teacher was out sick, he took over the lectures in his classroom. Years later, when he became restless in college, he turned to carpentry, his ancestors' trade. And when he started teaching in higher ed, he took on a tough subject that many academics steer clear of: racism and other forms of oppression.



1953



I was born in **Brooklyn** to children of Eastern European immigrants. My father learned English in elementary school; my mother was the first in her family to go to college. Both earned advanced degrees and became public school teachers in New York City. Their clear message to me: Being a teacher is the best way to contribute to the world.



1962

I was a big reader as a kid but not much of a talker. The whole family remembers the first time I spoke at the dinner table. I corrected a historical fact about **Andrew Jackson**. Everyone stopped talking and looked at me.

1964



My sixth-grade teacher, Mr. Becker, who gave us weekly lectures on history, had to be out on medical leave. He asked me to give the lecture on the origins of **World War I**. I loved it. I was only 11.

1967

I went to a "desegregated" public high school, but the school itself was deeply divided. I didn't realize how much I was in a bubble of whiteness until I joined a community center in another part of Brooklyn that was consciously, racially, and economically mixed. Being in a place that emphasized

the "richness of difference" changed my life.

1970

At Harvard College, my roommates were black, and when we would go to meals separately, I'd sit at the white tables, they at the black ones. When we went to the dining hall together, we'd create a new space — our own table, to which an assortment of students, white and black, would eventually drift.

1974

I was restless at Harvard, not sure what I wanted to do. I had a strong hands-on side that wasn't being nurtured. I almost dropped out to work as a **carpenter**, the trade of my immigrant grandfather and the avocation of my father.

1976

I began my career teaching high school industrial arts and then shifted to Roxbury Community College in Boston, where I started the state's first computer-assisted drafting program. We developed partnerships with computer companies and design firms, which provided jobs for the mostly black and Latino students at the school. In the early 1980s, I started my doctoral work and my interest in these partnerships became the subject of my dissertation and scholarship.

1988

I got offered an appointment to teach school principals at the University of Massachusetts–Boston. I lived out my biggest fear about teaching about race. Even though I knew it was important, I was afraid to and didn't really know how. I touched on it lightly and started dancing away when the doctoral cohort — about half students of color, many with years of anti-bias experience — stopped me. They pushed me to teach about race, and I stumbled through it with plenty of amazing support from them, and lots of humility.



TEITEL: JANET STEARNS



1999

I got invited to teach a course (part time) in organizational leadership at HGSE. Excited, humbled, and nervous, I decided to stay true to my new commitment to teach about race and built in a case about the history of student protests about race at the Ed School and how the school had responded (or not). I was glad to teach the case, although I realized doing so might be seen as a bit edgy for a new adjunct faculty member. I was relieved to be asked to return to teach the next semester.

FACULTY: EMMERICH DAVIES ESCOBAR; JILL ANDERSON; STANFORD UNIVERSITY; JILL ANDERSON

2011

In my third year of directing the School Leadership Program, I brainstormed with students about what they would need to be transformative leaders around equity and diversity. We identified a set of competencies and designed programming. Two years later, the Dean's Advisory Committee on Equity and Diversity adapted the competencies and made them schoolwide.

2014

I was lying on the floor of Gutman lobby for a **die-in protest** for the nonindictment of the police officer who shot Michael Brown in Ferguson. When a doctoral student with a megaphone asked what each of us can and will do, I thought about what I know best — leadership and school improvement — and resolved to work on getting more and better quality integrated schools. The following spring, I piloted a course, The Promise of Integrated Schools. A year later, we launched Reimagining Integration: The Diverse and Equitable Schools Project.

## NEW FACES ON CAMPUS

THIS PAST FALL, THREE NEW FACULTY MEMBERS AND ONE VISITING PROFESSOR JOINED THE SCHOOL

**Emmerich Davies Escobar**, assistant professor, specializes in education policy and politics, the political economy of development, and the politics of service provision, with a regional focus on South Asia. Davies Escobar joined the Ed School from the Ph.D. program in political science at the University of Pennsylvania. He will be teaching two courses in the spring: The Politics of Education in the Developing World and Comparative Education and International Development.

**IRVIN SCOTT, ED.M.'07, ED.D.'11**, senior lecturer, served for the past five years as the deputy director for K–12 education at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Prior, he was an English teacher for 11 years, a principal, an assistant superintendent, and the chief academic officer for Boston Public Schools. Scott is leading the yearlong course School Leadership: Seminar and Practicum for School Developers.

**Bertrand Schneider**, assistant professor, was recently a postdoctoral researcher at Stanford Graduate School of Education. His research interests include the development of new and original interfaces for collaborative learning in formal and informal learning environments like maker spaces. Schneider is teaching Multi-modal Learning Analytics.

**Claudia Costin** joins the Ed School as a visiting professor of practice for the academic year. She previously served as the senior director for education at the World Bank Group. Prior, Costin was the secretary of education for the city of Rio de Janeiro. This fall, she taught two courses: Education in Global Cities: Transforming Education in New York, Rio de Janeiro, and Shanghai and International Organizations and Education for Development: The Role of the World Bank.



## CONNECTIONS MATTER

When current doctoral student **TYLER THIGPEN** started his residency at Transcend, a national nonprofit dedicated to accelerating innovation in how we define “school,” he knew there were other Ed School students and graduates involved. He didn’t quite realize the extent, however, until they all got together for a retreat last summer.

“We were at the retreat, and I thought, wow, we’re only 11 teammates strong and four of us are Ed School folks,” Thigpen says. “And not just Ed School, but all Ed.L.D.” And the four, including **JENN CHARLOT, ED.L.D.’15**, **BRITTANY ERICKSON, ED.L.D.’16**, and **CHRISTINE ORTIZ, ED.L.D.’17**, are working together in ways that are very 21st century.

“We’re living what we consider to be the future of work, with individuals all over,” Thigpen says. There’s no physical office space. Teammates are in San Francisco; Madison, Wisconsin; Orlando, Florida; New York City; Chicago; and Denver. Thigpen is back home in Atlanta.

He says the work they do is also very transparent and involves lots of check-ins using Google docs, Slack, and social media. Their org chart is flexible.

“Most individuals in the organization have the same title of partner with no levels,” he says. Some workers take on managerial duties for accountability, yes, but mainly for mentoring and coaching, “to push and support” one another. They also have a fun way of signing off at the end of the week.

“Every Friday at 5 p.m., we hop on a Slack channel to give shout-outs to one another in alignment with our core values,” he says. “The process arose organically from people feeling sort of goofy at the end of the week — I guess I’m done now — and so now we have a way of connecting to bookend the week.”

This way of working, he says, is in line with how Transcend thinks schools should operate: believing that genuine connections are at the heart of the work.

“You see this emphasis in relationships in all of our interactions, internally and externally. From the culture of our Slack channel to email to phone calls to retreats to our goals,” he says. “In fact, I’m currently working on strategic community development for the organization, which I’m very much suited for as a trained pastor. They put me in this role partly for that reason.” LH

WISE WORDS

**“We are living in a revolution in biology now.”**

Professor **Jack Shonkoff** on advances in neuroscience, which tell us even more about how the link between environment, behavior, and brain activity affects academic achievement. (*Newsweek*)



## Dear Data. I Need You. Faster.

AS MORE AND MORE districts of all sizes started collecting data to evaluate what programs and interventions were working for their students and which weren’t, it became clear to the team at the Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) that this information was helpful only if educators had a way to interpret it — and in a timely way. So last year, CEPR created Proving Ground, a five-year project geared toward helping districts eliminate the need to hire research firms to conduct costly and time-consuming evaluations of their initiatives.

“It started as an idea on how to get data back in a much shorter cycle. It usually takes years,” says Bi Vuong, the project’s director. “We wanted to get data back faster, including analysis, so that districts could make managerial decisions and make changes in practice with their curriculum. It’s great that there’s data analysis, but if it comes after I’ve already submitted my budget, that’s not helpful.”

What’s unique about the project is that while districts will be able to learn from analysis of their specific data, they will also benefit from the combined data created by all 13 districts involved in the project.

“Most school districts are smaller than 30,000 kids,” Vuong says. “We’re able to use data from the larger network of 230,000 kids. Especially for a 5,000-student district, they’d never be able to effectively test if something works. That’s even true for a 50,000-student district. They need that larger sample size.”

For the first year of the project, the districts are focusing on the impact of two education software programs — Achieve 3000 and ST Math. In February, districts provided their data to CEPR and, by May, received back analysis that looked at, among other things, whether the software made an impact and for which students and how the program’s impact in one district compared with the impact felt at other districts using the same program. There were also actionable reports districts could begin using right away to develop future plans. LH



TO LEARN MORE, INCLUDING WAYS TO JOIN THE PROJECT: [PROVINGGROUND.CEPR.HARVARD.EDU](http://PROVINGGROUND.CEPR.HARVARD.EDU)

Illustration by Greg Clarke

STUDY SKILLS

## Lizzie Moore, Ed.M.

Yes, Lizzie Moore owns overalls and can drive a tractor. (The compost spreader is her favorite.) And yes, with the rise of CSAs and glossy magazines like *Modern Farmer*, she admits there’s a hip factor to farming these days. But none of these are the reasons she left the classroom to start her very own farm on seven acres in Napa, California.

“I always loved the outdoors,” says Moore, a student in the Specialized Studies Program who is here learning about place-based food entrepreneurship programs. “I always wanted to teach outdoors.” With BOCA Farm, that’s exactly what she’s doing. After getting the farm up and running, she circled back to her former school, Blue Oak Elementary, also in Napa, and created a partnership that brings students into the fields for extended periods.

“Most of the time, there are one-off field trips where students learn for a day where food comes from,” she says. “That’s the drive-by approach, where you don’t get the emotional and practical aspects. You don’t see what happens when it rains or there’s frost.”

Instead, at BOCA, fourth- and fifth-grade students and teachers spend a full 10 school days per semester at the farm, fully participating in the farm’s operation. For Moore, this means putting her teacher’s hat back on.

“I help teachers develop ideas and goals, which is a highlight — teaching based on what’s in season! I also instruct students. The farm classroom is full of surprises: cherry tomatoes that taste like candy, a jackrabbit that suddenly pops out from behind a squash vine, a volunteer crop from the prior season.”

Her favorite part of these days, she says, is realizing how the simplest activities can spark questions and creativity.

“I’ll never forget when a group of students spent almost half a day digging a hole. They wondered why the consistency and color of the soil changed as they dug and why the moisture content was higher deeper down. They strove to identify all sorts of bugs and roots,” she says. “They brought their questions back to the classroom, where they researched and recorded their findings. Back at the farm, the kids felt a newfound sense of connection to the site, and their next round of questioning became more sophisticated: What would happen if we used the deeper soils to germinate seeds? What is the mineral content of the deepest soil? How do farmers test their soil? I asked myself: Who knew that a shovel could be such a powerful learning tool?” LH

Photograph by Jonathan Kozowyk





# Stay Calm and Play Frisbee

HOW A SIMPLE PLASTIC DISC CAN HELP KIDS LEARN SELF-CONTROL, RESPECT, AND POSITIVE ENERGY

STORY BY [BEN SEARLE, ED.M.'17](#)


**A** S A KID, I LOVED throwing and running after Frisbees with my dad. When I got to college, I tried out for the ultimate Frisbee team at the University of Texas–Austin and didn't make it. But it was a very friendly rejection, and I appreciated the positive energy that most ultimate players seemed to share. I continued playing. Eventually, while working as a Peace Corps volunteer in Panama, I began using ultimate Frisbee as a simple way to build relationships with young people. It is amazing how quickly kids learn to throw and catch the disc. Then, in 2012, still in Panama, I helped launch Ultimate Without Borders.

One of the best parts of the game, especially when working with young people through the nonprofit, is something called spirit of the game. This “rule” for how to play the sport is actually an ideal tool for social and emotional learning. For starters, players mediate disagreements via self-officiating — there are no official referees. But it goes beyond that. In ultimate, players must demonstrate respect, integrity, and self-control. At the end of a game, it's common for both teams to perform a cheer or play an icebreaker to show appreciation for the other

team. It's a reminder, especially for young people, that joy and friendship are more important than winning.

If your organization works with youth, give ultimate a try. Although there is no umbrella site for ultimate Frisbee, there are thousands of local leagues and clubs around the country. You can Google search for “ultimate Frisbee” with your city and state, and local organizations will pop right up. Ultimate players love teaching new players, so most would be thrilled to get an invitation from a school or youth organization. You can also check out five organizations from around the world that already teach youth via ultimate Frisbee: Girls Ultimate Movement (United States), Bridging the Gaps (India), Juega Ultimate Frisbee (Mexico), 10 Million Discs (the Balkans), and Ultimate Peace (Israel).

**BEN SEARLE** IS THE CO-FOUNDER OF ULTIMATE WITHOUT BORDERS

 WATCH SEARLE AND IEP STUDENTS TEACH PROFESSOR FERNANDO REIMERS HOW TO PLAY: [GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS](#)

## WHAT IS ULTIMATE FRISBEE?

Picture football, soccer, and basketball mashed into one sport, but instead of a ball, there's a plastic flying disc. And no referees or umpires. Or physical contact. Instead, players try to score by passing the flying disc to a teammate in the other team's end zone. The person holding the disc can't take any steps. Although people have been tossing around flying discs of various sorts for decades (such as metal pie tins before plastic ones were invented), as an official sport, ultimate is relatively new. The first ultimate game was played in 1968 at Columbia High School in Maplewood, New Jersey, between the student council and the student newspaper, the *Columbian*. Naturally, the newspaper won the match, 11–7.



HEAR FROM FILM PRODUCER JOEL SILVER, A FORMER COLUMBIA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT, ON HELPING TO FORMALIZE (AND NAME) THE SPORT: [GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS](#)

## BITE-SIZED LEARNING

SIMPLE ACTIVITIES SCHOOLS CAN USE TO HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP NONACADEMIC SKILLS

**Y**OU KNOW how important it is for kids to develop life skills like managing emotions or learning to make better decisions — skills that are actually as important as doing well on an academic test. The problem is, you don't know where to start. Or maybe you did start by buying some expensive prepackaged program that just isn't working for your school's particular needs.

Now what?

Associate Professor Stephanie Jones and her team at Easel Lab's SEL Analysis Project came up with an idea called “kernel of practice” — evidence-based strategies and activities that educators can easily use with their students that are free and flexible. (Schools pick and chose which strategies they want to try.) The team shared strategies for elementary schools:

► **“I” Messages:** Managing and communicating negative or difficult emotions can be challenging. “I” messages help children (and adults) identify feelings and communicate them appropriately. These messages support the development of an emotions vocabulary. If you notice your child or student feeling angry or embarrassed, help them use an “I” message to describe what they are feeling. An “I” message has three parts:

- 1: **I feel...** states how he or she feels as a result of the current situation.
- 2: **...when you...** in the second part allows the student to state what behavior caused this feeling.
- 3: **...and I would like...** lets the student name something that he or she would like to see happen as part of the resolution to the problem.

► **Say It Back:** When students use “say it back,” they engage listening skills to attend closely to what another person is saying, and they demonstrate understanding by repeating it. For example: “You feel sad when I call you names. You want me to apologize and not call you names anymore.” “Say it back” is intended to develop students' ability to focus on what other people are thinking and feeling and to support empathy and understanding.

► **Feelings Thermometer:** Emotions run on a continuum from low-key to intense and students often lack the ability to recognize when they are about to be overpowered by emotions. Before they can control their responses, students first must be able to identify what they are feeling and gauge intensity. Just as a thermometer measures rising temperatures, a “feelings thermometer” measures rising emotion levels. Using a scale of 0–5, students can use the “feelings thermometer” to describe their level of emotional intensity.

► **Peace Path:** In any conflict, the goal is to find a win–win solution, but this can only happen when both parties are clear about their feelings, feel calm enough to actively listen to one another, and have the skills to negotiate effectively. It is important to give students an initial structure for this kind of complex negotiation. The step-by-step “peace path” model includes:

- 1: **Tell the Problem:** Each person gives an “I” message, with the other person summarizing that message with “say it back.” This ensures that each knows how the other is feeling.
- 2: **Brainstorm Together:** Each person suggests a solution to the problem, with the other person summarizing to be sure he or she has understood.
- 3: **Solve the Problem:** Both people discuss the possible solutions and agree on one to try. They should be striving for a win–win result, something that both parties can live with, and then try it out. **LH**



READ A RELATED PIECE FROM USABLE KNOWLEDGE ON ANOTHER STRATEGY, BRAIN GAMES: [GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS](#)

ON MY BOOKSHELF

# Dana McCoy, Assistant Professor, Psychologist

**YOU'RE CURRENTLY READING:** *Swimming Studies*, a memoir by artist and former competitive swimmer Leanne Shapton.

**THE THING THAT DREW YOU TO IT:** In general, I like to read memoirs. I was also a competitive swimmer for 16 years growing up, so I have a personal connection to the topic.

**FAVORITE BOOK FROM CHILDHOOD AND WHY YOU LOVED IT:** *Nancy Drew*. The books remind me of my grandmother, who gave me her copy of *The Secret of the Old Clock* when I was 8.

**PEOPLE WOULD BE SURPRISED TO KNOW I'VE NEVER READ ...** *Moby Dick!*

**IF YOU WERE TO GIVE A BOOK AS A GIFT TO SOMEONE, WHAT WOULD IT BE, WHOM WOULD IT BE FOR, AND WHY?** I recently started giving my graduating students a picture book that relates in some way to their interests or the work we've done together. As someone who studies early childhood, I like to find every opportunity to remind my students of the importance of early reading! My most recent gift was *Make Way for Ducklings*, which I gave to a departing doctoral fellow from Brazil. Its plot centers on the importance of early parenting, which is her research area of focus. I also wanted to give her something to remind her of her time in Boston.

**LAST BOOK YOU READ THAT SURPRISED YOU AND WHY:** On a whim, I recently re-read *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. I remember loving it as a child but was struck in my latest read by its complexity and timelessness.

**FAVORITE BOOK THAT WAS TURNED INTO A MOVIE AND DID YOU LIKE THE BOOK OR MOVIE BETTER?** I was dragged to see the last *Harry Potter* movie on opening night, and it inspired me to (finally) read the books. As usual, the books were better than the movie, but given that I already knew the ending, I did find them to be a bit anticlimactic.

**PAPER BOOK OR E-READER?** E-reader. I travel a lot, so they're more practical.

**FAVORITE SPOT TO CURL UP WITH A GOOD BOOK:** On my sofa with my cat, Mu.

**NEXT UP:** I'm looking for suggestions. Maybe *Moby Dick*? LH

FOR A FULL LIST OF BOOKS FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE: [GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS](http://GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS). IF YOU'RE PART OF THE ED SCHOOL COMMUNITY AND YOU'VE RECENTLY PUBLISHED A BOOK, LET US KNOW: [BOOKNOTES@GSE.HARVARD.EDU](mailto:BOOKNOTES@GSE.HARVARD.EDU)

## POWERED BY GIRL

Lyn Mikel Brown

In her new book, *Powered by Girl*, **LYN MIKEL BROWN, ED.D.'89**, a writer and education professor at Colby College, explores how young women have embraced activism and how adult women have supported them and need to continue to support them in their movements. As she writes, "This field guide is not so much a how-to, as it is a how-to-be: how to be in relationship with girls — how to hear them, learn from them, enable and support their ideas, join them in their activism."

## SAFE IS NOT ENOUGH

Michael Sadowski

There has been a sea change in public attitudes around gender and sexuality, yet progress on LGBTQ issues in schools has moved slowly, writes **MICHAEL SADOWSKI, ED.M.'95, ED.D.'05**. Although more schools have worked hard to make school a safer place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students, Sadowski says this deficit model isn't enough — schools have to also support students academically and create more inclusive environments so that students feel not only safe, but also welcome.

## PARTICIPATORY CREATIVITY: INTRODUCING ACCESS AND EQUITY TO THE CREATIVE CLASSROOM

Edward Clapp

**EDWARD CLAPP, ED.M.'07, ED.D.'14**, writes that with *Participatory Creativity*, he wanted to broaden what we mean when we think of creativity. This struggle was something Clapp had to grapple with when he was a student at the Ed School and later at Project Zero, where he works. He also wanted to figure out ways to break down barriers to participating in creativity, whether in the classroom or the community, and to think about creative ideas less as something only individuals come up with and more as something that emerges socially.

## STUDENT SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Elaine Brzycki and Henry Brzycki

The goal of their new book, writes **ELAINE BRZYCKI, ED.M.'90**, and her husband, Henry Brzycki, is to have readers rethink what they mean by student success and student well-being, and re-evaluate what systems are currently in place to help students live happy, healthy lives. Starting with a chapter called "Higher Education and the Decline of Well-Being," *Student Success* includes examples of promising practices that colleges and universities can use to help students succeed and eventually define achievement for themselves.

## BECOME THE PRIMARY TEACHER EVERYONE WANTS TO HAVE

Seán Delaney

After teaching for nearly a dozen years, **SEÁN DELANEY, ED.M.'99**, knows that teaching is tough and no matter how hard you work, there's always more to do. In this career guide primarily for new teachers (although experienced teachers will also find it useful), Delaney describes what teaching is really like and offers tips and strategies for creating a fulfilling teaching career, with chapters focused on relating to colleagues, work-life balance, and communicating better with parents.



Photograph by Ekaterina Smirnova

A LOOK AT WHY STUDENTS GET INCREASINGLY  
BORED AS THEY GET OLDER — AND WHY IT MATTERS  
STORY BY ZACHARY JASON

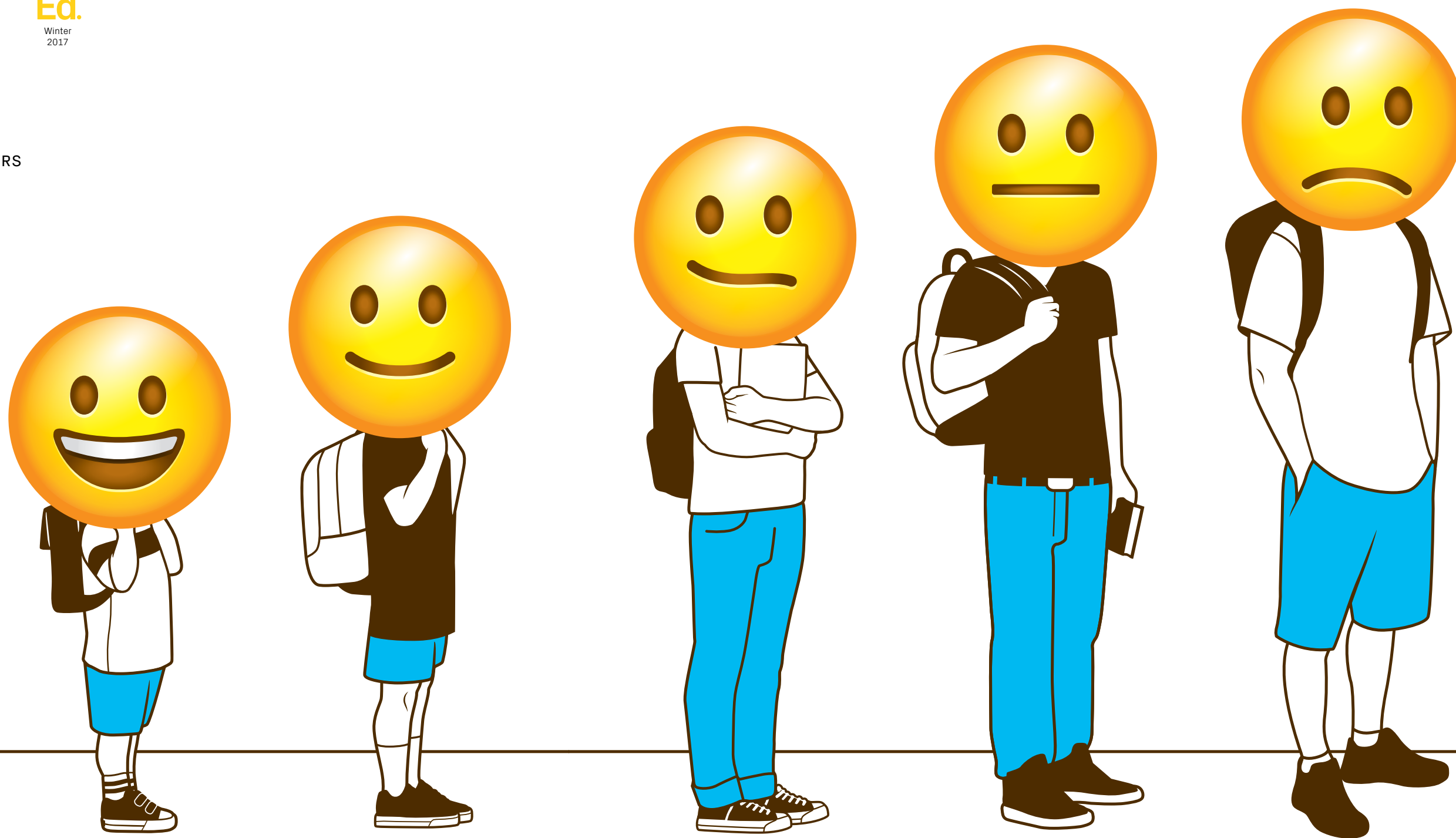


ILLUSTRATION BY TODD DETWILER

# Bored Out OF Their Minds



## For two weeks in third grade,

I preached the gospel of the wild boar. My teacher, the sprightly Mrs. DeWilde, assigned my class an open-ended research project: Create a five-minute presentation about any exotic animal. I devoted my free time before bedtime to capturing the wonders of the *Sus scrofa* in a 20-minute sermon. I filled a poster as big as my 9-year-old self with photographs, facts, and charts, complete with a fold-out diagram of the snout. During my presentation, I shared my five-stanza rhyming poem about the swine's life cycle, painted the species' desert and taiga habitats in florid detail, and made uncanny snorting impressions. I attacked each new project that year — a sketch of the water cycle, a history of the Powhatan — with the same evangelism.

Flash forward to the fall of my senior year in high school, and my near-daily lunchtime routine: hunched over at a booth in Wendy's, chocolate Frosty in my right hand, copying calculus worksheets from Jimmy and Spanish homework from Chris with my left while they copied my notes on *Medea* or *Jane Eyre*. Come class, I spent more time playing Snake on my graphing calculator than reviewing integrals, more time daydreaming than conjugating verbs.

What happened in those nine years? Many things. But mainly, like the majority of my fellow Americans, I fell victim to the epidemic of classroom boredom.

A 2013 Gallup poll of 500,000 students in grades five through 12 found that nearly eight in 10 elementary students were "engaged" with school, that is, attentive, inquisitive, and generally optimistic. By high school, the number dropped to four in 10. A 2015 follow-up study found that less than a third of 11th-graders felt engaged. When Gallup asked teens in 2004 to select the top three words that describe how they feel in school from a list of 14 adjectives, "bored" was chosen most often, by half the students. "Tired" was second, at 42 percent. Only 2 percent said they were never bored. The evidence suggests that, on a daily basis, the vast majority of teenagers seriously contemplate banging their heads against their desks.

Some of boredom's progression seems obvious, such as:

► **An escalating emphasis on standardized tests.** Fifth-grade teacher JILL GOLDBERG, ED.M.'93, told me, "My freedom as a teacher continues to be curtailed with every passing year. I am not able to teach for the sake of teaching." With lack of teacher freedom comes lack of student freedom, and disengagement and tuning out.

► **The novelty of school itself fades with each grade.** Here I am for another year in the same blue plastic chair, same graffitied fake wooden desk, surrounded by the same faces. Repetition begets boredom (e.g., I haven't had a Frosty in a decade).

► **Lack of motivation.** Associate Professor Jal Mehta says, "There's no big external motivating force in American education except for the small fraction of kids who want to go to the most selective colleges."

► **The transition from the tactile and creative to the cerebral and regimented.** Mehta calls it the switch from "child-centered learning to subject-centered learning." In third grade I cut with scissors, smeared glue sticks, and doodled with scented magic markers. By 12th grade I was plugging in formulas on a TI-83 and writing the answers on fill-in-the-blank worksheets. And research papers stimulate



**"We have to stop seeing boredom as a frilly side effect. It is a central issue. Engagement is a precondition for learning."**

JAL MEHTA, ABOVE, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

and beget rewards at a thousandth the speed of Snapchat and Instagram.

But who cares? Isn't boredom just a natural side effect of daily life's tedium? Until very recently, that's how educators, academics, and neuroscientists alike have treated it. In fact, in the preface to *Boredom: A Lively History*, Peter Toohey presents the possibility that boredom might not even exist. What we call "boredom" might be just a "grab bag of a term" that covers "frustration, surfeit, depression, disgust, indifference, apathy." TODD ROSE, ED.M.'01, ED.D.'07, a lecturer at the Ed School and director of the Mind, Brain, and Education Program, says the American education system treats boredom as

a "character flaw. We say, 'If you're bored in school, there's something wrong with you.'"

But new research has begun to reveal boredom's dismal effects in school and on the psyche. A 2014 study that followed 424 students at the University of Munich over the course of an academic year found a cycle in which boredom bore lower test results, which bore higher levels of boredom, which bore still lower test results. Boredom accounts for nearly a third of variation in student achievement. A 2010 German study found that boredom "instigates a desire to escape from the situation" that causes boredom. It's not surprising, then, that half of high school dropouts cite boredom as their primary motivator for leaving. A 2003 Columbia University survey found that U.S. teenagers who said they were often bored were more than 50 percent more likely than not-bored teens to smoke, drink, and use illegal drugs. Proneness to boredom is also associated with anxiety, impulsiveness, hopelessness, loneliness, gambling, and depression.

Educators and academics, Ed School faculty and alumni among them, have begun to engage with boredom, investigating its systemic causes and potential solutions. Mehta, who's been studying engagement since 2010, says, "We have to stop seeing boredom as a frilly side effect. It is a central issue. Engagement is a precondition for learning," he adds. "No learning happens until students agree to become engaged with the material."



"Yo, Mr. P., I just wanted to let you know on Day One that I'm not a science person."

"Mr. P., I'm not very good at science."

"Science is not my favorite subject, Mr. P."

Every year for 14 years, Victor Pereira Jr., heard this from a handful of his students during the first week of his ninth- and 10th-grade science classes. After falling behind in specific subjects throughout elementary and middle school, students "were full of preconceived notions" of their capabilities, says Pereira, who taught at South Boston's Excel High School before becoming a lecturer at the Ed School and master teacher in the Harvard Teacher Fellows Program. Engaging the students who are already discouraged was an uphill battle.

For comparison, Pereira remembers observing a second-grade science teacher's lesson and leaving the class deflated. "Those kids were curious, they listened intently, and they were excited to take chances." In second

grade, he says, “you can use your common language and experiences from your everyday life to explain what’s happening and engage in the science lesson.”

However, as students advance in science, learning its progressively technical terminology “requires almost learning another language.” Technicality can breed boredom and frustration, which breeds more boredom.

As Rose puts it, “The friction is cumulative.” For example, the best predictor for how students will fare in algebra is how they fared in pre-algebra. A downward spiral emerges: “You’re not doing well, and you’re going to keep not doing well,” Rose says. “And then that becomes a part of how you see yourself as a learner.”

Rose has a master’s and doctorate from the Ed School, but he also had a 0.9 GPA in high school before he dropped out, primarily from boredom. He says he grew weary of the “poor design of the learning environment that created so many barriers to me being able to learn.” For one, because of his “pretty poor working memory,” he often forgot to bring home his homework or forgot to bring the homework he completed back to school. He says he was never taught skills like planning and organizing, and failed because the grading rubric neglected his style of learning. Eventually, “I couldn’t see why I should be there. They didn’t know why I should be there. We both agreed.”

**SAM SEMROW, ED.M.’16**, can relate. She attended a public high with a 10/10 rating on *greatschools.com* in a wealthy suburb of Chicago, but what she calls the “lack of individualized understanding of who we were as students” discouraged her. She read novels through math class, skipped days, contemplated dropping out, and barely graduated with a 1.8 GPA.

Rose has proposed a solution. In his book *The End of Average*, he illustrates that classrooms are falsely designed to cater to the “average learner.” Fourth-graders take tests and read texts written at a “fourth-grade reading level” that assume an “average” fourth-grader’s knowledge of rock formations and the Civil War and the “average” fourth-grader’s cognitive development. In reality, Rose says, “that average fourth-grader doesn’t exist.” Each student is much more “jagged” in his or her skill-set — advanced in memory, underdeveloped in organization, say, or vice versa. By designing for the average of everyone, the classroom is ideal to no one. And in this design, boredom runs rampant, and there’s no room for a cure.

“If you see human potential as a bell curve and there are only some kids who are going to be great and most kids are mediocre, then en-

gagement really wouldn’t matter,” Rose says. “But if you really believe that all kids are capable, then you would build environments that really worked hard to sustain engagement and nurture potential.”

Rose suggests adding much more choice to the classroom. Allow exams to be written or taken orally. Assign students more hands-on projects, in which they become in control of their own learning. New research bolsters his theory. Since 2011 Mehta and current doctoral student **SARAH FINE, ED.M.’13**, have been studying “deeper learning” (learning that is both challenging and engaging) at more than 30 American high schools, and they have found that schools with the most project-based curricula tend to foster the fewest bored students.

Of course, no teacher can assign and grade 30 individual projects and create 30 individual lesson plans every day. Rose suggests schools more often exploit digital, scalable technologies that can deliver readings and assignments tailored to specific types of learners. With boredom, Rose says, “the focus is on the curriculum first. I think we can talk to teachers about it second. Let’s do something *for* them instead of asking more of them.”



Still, teachers can staunch boredom. Mehta and Fine discovered that even in underperforming schools where boredom was near universal, “there were individual teachers who



ROSE: PATRICIA SAXLER; OPPOSITE: TOM KATES

**“The friction is cumulative. You’re not doing well, and you’re going to keep not doing well. And then that becomes a part of how you see yourself as a learner.”**

**TODD ROSE**, BELOW,  
DIRECTOR OF THE MIND, BRAIN,  
AND EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Why the Periphery Is Often More Powerful Than the Core

By Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine, Ed.M.’13

**WHEN WE BEGAN OUR STUDY** of powerful learning in high schools five years ago, we were not thinking of electives or extracurriculars as places to look. But as we began to visit schools, we noticed a pattern: Often, in core disciplinary classes like history and science, instruction was teacher-centered, tasks were unchallenging, and students were frequently passive and often bored. When we asked students why they were learning what they were learning, their answers tended to be uninspired: “because we need it for college” or “because the teacher said so.”

By contrast, when we stumbled into spaces that initially lay outside of our study — art classes, debate club meetings, newspaper, Model UN, athletic practices — these same students looked and sounded totally different. In these spaces, they were actively engaged and eagerly assuming roles as leaders. Over time, we shifted some of our research so that we could investigate what made these “peripheral” spaces so powerful and explore what this might tell us about the disciplinary “core.”

Extracurriculars, our work suggests, tend to differ from core classes in a number of important ways. They are voluntary rather than mandatory; they often involve work that is undertaken collectively rather than individually; they feature opportunities for peer leadership and peer-to-peer learning; they involve dimensions of playfulness; and they are aligned to activities that are valued in broader American culture. As a result, these learning spaces take on a sense of purpose and vitality that all too often is missing from normal disciplinary classes.

Extracurriculars are also usually well-designed as learning environments. In particular, they allow, and often require, learners to do what Professor David Perkins has called “playing the whole game at a junior level.” For example, participants in a musical theater production have the opportunity to experience the process from soup to nuts: the initial line reading, the blocking, the development of the set design, the back-and-forth between directors and actors, and, ultimately, the integration of these elements in a final performance. By contrast, core disciplinary classes rarely afford students a glimpse into the domains to which they are connected. Science students, for example, often do not see how new scientific knowledge is produced unless they work in a laboratory during college or graduate school.

Part of why the extracurricular mode is so powerful is that it draws from the tradition of apprenticeship learning. Unlike in most disciplinary subjects, adults who lead these activities frequently continue to be involved as participants as well as teachers — they play in adult soccer leagues, act in community theaters. This serves to deepen their understandings and commitments, as well as to keep their perspectives fresh. Finally, extracurriculars draw together opposing virtues that are critical for sustained and deep learning: passion because students have chosen the arena and are seeking to excel in it, and precision because there are ample opportunities for practice and feedback.

Once we began to see this world this way, we realized that the most powerful core disciplinary classes that we observed shared



many of these characteristics. The teachers in these classes are less interested in covering content and more interested in helping students learn how to think in the mode of the domain; they enact a “cognitive apprenticeship” model that echoes what happens in extracurriculars. They foster ownership by organizing the learning around the production of something that is authentic and high quality. Once students have a sense of purpose, teachers build in the more prosaic aspects of learning; writing a letter to a city councilwoman is an occasion to learn how to craft an introductory paragraph much as an upcoming basketball game motivates layup drills. These classes also frequently involve a real (if bounded) element of choice; students need to produce an essay or documentary film that accomplishes certain academic objectives, but they can choose the topic that interests them. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the ethos of these classrooms is similar to what one might find at an athletic practice or theater rehearsal — an ethos that combines playfulness with purposefulness, drawing together the warm virtue of passion and interest with the cooler virtues of intellectual demand.

There is much to be learned from these “extras”; they illuminate some of the most important qualities that characterize powerful learning environments. Strong teachers already incorporate some of these features into their classes; if this became the rule and not the exception, perhaps students would be as excited for what happens during the school day as they are for what happens after the final bell.

**JAL MEHTA** IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT THE ED SCHOOL AND **SARAH FINE**, ED.M.’13, IS A DOCTORAL STUDENT.



MEHTA AND FINE RECOMMEND THESE PUBLICATIONS TO LEARN MORE:

► *THE MEANS TO GROW UP* BY ROBERT HALPERN

► “THE WHY, WHAT, WHERE AND HOW OF DEEPER LEARNING IN AMERICAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS” BY MEHTA AND FINE AT [GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS](http://GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS)

► “FROM THE COURT TO THE CLASSROOM: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT, LEARNING AND IDENTITY IN BASKETBALL AND CLASSROOM MATHEMATICS” BY NA’ILAH SUAD NASIR AND VICTORIA HAND AT [GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS](http://GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS)

were creating classrooms where students were really engaged and motivated.” These teachers trusted students to sometime control the class. They tried to learn from their students as much as they taught. They weren’t afraid to go off script.

In some ways it’s no surprise Spanish and calculus were my worst subjects senior year: They had the most monotonous curricula and the dullest teachers. In Spanish we spent weeks watching the “educational” and horrendously acted soap opera *La Catrina* and more weeks slogging through call-and-response lessons recorded 20 years earlier, on cassette. I had by then ruled out a career in math, and my teacher did little to explain the pertinence of limits and derivatives in my life beyond that I may fail another test. My English and U.S. history teachers, however, inspired me to thrive. Mr. Howell had us imagine how *Huckleberry Finn*’s Jim and Pap would interact if they were guests on *Da Ali G Show* and helped us identify fallacies by having us debate the war in Iraq. And Mr. Rice culminated each chapter of American history with a class-wide debate in which we each assumed the role of a different figure from that period, bonus points for showing up in costume.

Of course, there’s value in teaching students to suck it up and work. As Mehta notes, learning any discipline or gaining any skill requires a certain amount of “necessary boredom. ... If you want to be a great violinist, you’ve got to practice your scales. You want to play basketball? You’ve got to shoot your free throws.” An overemphasis on engagement, Emory professor Mark Bauerlein writes in “The Paradox of Classroom Boredom” in *Education Week*, may inadvertently “stunt students in preparation” for college, where pushing through tedious work—like memorizing equations for organic chemistry—is required to advance. “In telling [students], ‘You think the material is pointless and musty, but we’ll find ways to stimulate you,’ high school educators fail to teach them the essential skill of exerting oneself even when bored.”

“The problem,” Mehta says, “is that we haven’t created trajectories where students see the meaning and purpose that would make the necessary boredom endurable.” The problem is relevance.

Every teacher and academic I talked to kept coming back to relevance. Semrow says she grew bored because for most subjects, “I didn’t see what it meant for my life.” Few teachers contextualized their lessons. “Especially for 17- and 18-year-olds, we’re dealing with a lot of issues about what’s next for us.” The curriculum rarely addressed how trigonometry and

human anatomy fit into her future. But Semrow says she graduated by the grace of the few teachers who did stress relevance.

Pereira says that the examples of how biology fit into his students’ lives—for example, explaining the water cycle through the Flint, Michigan, water crisis—often “weren’t good enough. They’re not in teenage language.” To counter that, he often let students “give better examples that translate to the larger group.” And when the class seemed particularly bored, he made room for in-class adjustments to reignite the lesson. For example, when he started a photosynthesis lesson one day, students sighed, “We already know this.” But one student brought up a news article about scientists who were experimenting with growing plants in space. Pereira then decided the students would design their own photosynthesis



**“Those kids were curious, they listened intently, and they were excited to take chances.”**

VICTOR PEREIRA, LEFT, ON WHEN HE WAS TEACHING HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE, WHERE STUDENTS OFTEN COMPLAINED OF BEING BORED. HE REMEMBERS OBSERVING A SECOND-GRADE SCIENCE TEACHER’S LESSON, AND LEAVING THE CLASS DEFLATED.



experiment testing various wavelengths and light intensities, and then present their data in a form of a letter of recommendation to NASA.

Rose adds that high schools rarely take advantage of an adolescent’s cognitive development. Teenagers “take on identities; they’re more socially oriented. This is the first time when abstract ideas can be motivating. They become more politically engaged and think about things like justice. Yet we’re still keeping them in the kind of education system... that wants nothing from them in terms of their own ideas. School has already decided what matters and [what it] expects from you. It’s like an airplane: Sit down, strap in, don’t talk, look forward. Why would it be meaningful?”

The beauty of relevance, Rose says, “is that it’s free. If you’re an educator or curriculum developer, and you saw your responsibility to ensure every kid knew why they were doing what they were doing, you can do that tomorrow.”

Of course, impassioned teachers who communicate the relevance of their lessons often aren’t enough. JILL GOLDBERG, ED.M.’93, who teaches fifth grade at a public school in Newtonville, New York, has been shaping her lessons to be more interesting and relevant for the past 24 years. Still, her students fiddle with pencils, scribble notes to friends, and “practically have drool coming out of their mouths.” She tells them, “I wish there was a full-wall mirror behind me ... , so you could see what your faces and body language convey to me.”

Goldberg lays some blame on parents. When she asks her students why they’re in school, “they tell me it is because their parents work and so this is where they need to be during the day. Some say it’s like their ‘job’ to go to school. ... No child ever [says] that learning and being educated is important. No one ever says that they love to learn new things no matter what the subject. No parents or students seem to believe that pure learning for the sake of learning is the goal.

“Why do my students’ parents work?” Goldberg adds. “They most likely tell their children that they work in order to make money in order to live the life they want to live. But do they love their work? Why have they chosen the field in which they work? Are these adults who are inspired to make the world a better place?”

Rose, however, cautions against casting too much blame on parents. “Even though it feels right, it will excuse [society] from the respon-

sibility of how we rethink our own environments in the classroom.”

For example, poor scheduling also cultivates boredom. Seven a.m. start times for high school often mean rising at dawn to catch the bus, which means much less sleep than the National Sleep Foundation’s recommended eight to 10 hours a night, which means severely diminished alertness. In most high schools, regardless of the subject, the day’s first classes have the worst average grade. Schools that have bumped start times an hour later have seen the number of Ds and Fs cut in half.

Mehta adds that “having students take six or seven classes of 45 or 50 minutes at a time basically gives them enough time to just start to do something before the period ends.” Often, much of that time is spent reviewing homework and menial tasks, exacerbating boredom. Semrow notes that “being in school longer would have given teachers more free time to reach out to me” to get to know her strengths and weaknesses as a learner.

Educators and scientists have yet to agree on a definition of boredom, let alone unearth its exact causes and cures in the classroom. The most exhaustive book on the subject to date, *Boredom in the Classroom: Addressing Student Motivation, Self-Regulation, and Engagement in Learning*, is 72 pages long. As Dean James Ryan recently wrote in *Education Week*, “Boredom ought to be considered much more seriously when thinking about ways to improve student outcomes. ... I would think it is in all of our interests at least to confront this stubborn fact of school rather than simply to accept boredom as inextricably linked to learning.”

“But the biggest shift we need,” Rose believes, is much more elemental. “We need to get away from thinking that the opposite of ‘bored’ is ‘entertained.’ It’s ‘engaged.’” It’s not about pumping cartoons and virtual reality games into the classroom, it’s about finding ways to make curriculum more resonant, personalized, and meaningful for every student. “Engagement is very meaningful at a neurological level, at a learning level, and a behavioral level. When kids are engaged, life is so much easier.”

ZACHARY JASON IS A BOSTON-BASED WRITER WHO WRITES FOR *BOSTON MAGAZINE*, *THE BOSTON GLOBE MAGAZINE*, AND *THE GUARDIAN*.



FOR MORE ON ROSE’S *END OF AVERAGE* RESEARCH FROM OUR FALL 2015 ISSUE: [GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS](http://GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS). READ DEAN RYAN’S BLOG POST ON BOREDOM: [GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS](http://GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED/EXTRAS)



# No More sink the Sub

WHAT IF YOU BROUGHT IN A MUSICIAN OR FARMER  
INSTEAD OF A WORKSHEET WHEN A TEACHER WAS OUT FOR THE DAY?

Story by Lory Hough Photographs by Jonathan Kozowyk

# One day,

while Sarah Cherry Rice was visiting a public school, she noticed an adult sitting in the back of a class texting. “Who’s that?” she asked.

It was the substitute teacher. “I was like, what? It felt like there was a babysitter. No teaching or learning was going on. I already don’t like inefficiency, so the thought that we were paying folks to be in a class and babysit and do nothing or just pass out worksheets or put on a movie” didn’t sit right, she says.

At the time, Cherry Rice, now a second-year Ed.L.D. student, was consulting in schools for Mass Insight and hadn’t given much thought to the subject of substitute teaching. But then another incident happened. “I sit on the site council for my daughter’s school in Boston, and a mom asked me when there would be a substitute in her son’s class. She said she wasn’t going to send him in on those days because it was always such a horrible situation.”

Is the state of substitute teaching, what one *Atlantic Monthly* writer calls “education’s toughest job,” really that bad?

Turns out, it kind of is. “Almost everyone appreciates at a gut level that what happens in the regular teacher’s absence is not often something to brag about,” said researcher **RAEGEN MILLER, ED.D.’05**, in a recent *Education Week* story. “It’s kind of an underbelly, one of the darker secrets of what happens in public education.”

As Cherry Rice discovered, substitute pay is very low, averaging about \$105 a day. Left with busy work, even subs not texting often have difficulty keeping kids engaged (sink the sub, anyone?). Across the country, a substitute shortage is leaving schools shorthanded while teachers struggle to prep lesson plans for subs to use. While some substitutes are excellent, at the extreme end, Cherry Rice discovered numerous stories about substitutes getting assaulted or having inappropriate relationships with students.

She was blown away. “It was like, holy cow.” She wondered: Wasn’t there a better way to provide schools with high-quality substitutes that made it easy on them, hassle-free for teachers, and full of useful learning for students? “I didn’t think I was the person to solve this,” she jokes, but nonetheless, she came up with an idea that one Boston principal calls “amazing,” one he wishes he himself had come up with.

An Uber for substitute teachers.

## WHAT IT IS

Called Parachute Teachers, Cherry Rice’s idea is, at its core, actually pretty simple: Parachute finds high-quality subs, handles background checks, offers basic training, and does the scheduling. Principals in Boston Public Schools, where she’s been piloting the program since last school year, email her when they need someone and she takes care of the rest. (Eventually, there will be a database that principals and office staff can log into to book Parachute subs themselves.)

But here’s why the idea is actually so “amazing”: Parachute is more than just an outsourcing service that provides a warm body when a teacher is out. It’s more than just a way to counter the substitute shortage. The subs themselves are unique. Cherry Rice knew that, in order to be successful, “Parachute had to disassociate from the existing substitute teacher model,” beginning with the teachers.

“I started interviewing people, and it turns out Boston has an incredible ecosystem of people who have expertise and want to be in schools, but there hasn’t been a clear pathway to come into schools,” she says. Most people don’t know where to begin or who to call to get started; many assume you need a teaching degree or at least have some classroom expe-

**“ONE GIRL WHO HAD MOVED HER CHAIR TO THE FRONT OF THE ROOM SAID, ‘OH! I GET IT. THE EMULSIFIER IS LIKE A GOOD SONG THAT COMES ON TO MAKE THE BOYS AND GIRLS DANCE TOGETHER!’ IT WAS A BRILLIANT ‘AHA’ MOMENT.”**

**Alexis Daniels, right, who started as a Parachute teacher last year at the McKay K-8 School in East Boston**







**PARACHUTE TEACHERS  
“PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH AN  
OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE  
THINGS THEY HAVEN’T EVER  
TALKED ABOUT BEFORE.... IT  
WAS DIFFERENT FROM WHAT  
THEY NORMALLY LEARN.  
THE KIDS LOVED IT.”**

**Jordan Weymer, left, principal of  
the McKay K-8 School in East Boston**

rience to be a sub. (You don’t. Requirements vary by state, from as little as a high school diploma or GED to a bachelor’s degree in any subject — not specifically education.)

Cherry Rice decided that Parachute teachers would be a different kind of substitute — experts in a range of fields — and they’d teach in a different way. Instead of handing out worksheets or popping in a movie, or even relying on a lesson from the regular teacher, Parachute teachers would instead bring their own project-based plan for the day (or class period), and they would ideally come from the community. They would be passionate about the material. A computer scientist, for example, might parachute into a class and teach kids how to create a game using code. An instructor from Berklee College of Music might teach kids about Yo-Yo Ma followed by a lesson on how to play the cello. A grad student might set up a makerspace and ask students to reimagine regular household items.

Not only does this new approach to substitute teaching make it easier on the regular teacher who doesn’t have to prep a lesson, but also — and more importantly — it gets kids interested so they’re not throwing paper airplanes or falling asleep in the back of the room.

“It’s enrichment, and that’s really appealing to me as a principal,” says Ed.L.D. candidate Jordy Sparks, a principal and former teacher in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, who has been working with Cherry Rice on the Parachute project.

Alexis Daniels started as a Parachute teacher last year at the McKay K-8 School in East Boston, where she lives and where she founded an urban community farm. For nearly two years, she has also been director of a teaching kitchen at the local YMCA.

Currently, she subs at least once or twice a week at McKay (Parachute subs can teach as little or as often as their schedule allows), bringing hands-on activities and lessons about nutrition and food systems. Recently, she taught kids in a fifth-grade science class about emulsion and polarity, secretly couched within a lesson on how to make salad dressing.

“I brought in about a dozen jars, experimental ingredients like red wine vinegar, baking soda, mustard, mayonnaise, honey, and flour, and we went through the scientific process, seeking to answer the question: Do water and oil mix?” she says. “We created hypotheses and made mixtures.” The goal was not just to mix the ingredients, but for the ingredients to stay mixed.

“Students had to guess what qualities made the water and oil stick together and re-

cord their results,” she says. “To describe the concept of an emulsifier, I used the analogy of being at a dance, with boys on one side of the room and girls on the other. They don’t want to touch, so you have to add something else, something special, to make them stay together.” They discovered that mustard was the best emulsifier, but Daniels’ favorite discovery came at the end of class.

“One girl who had moved her chair to the front of the room said, ‘Oh! I get it. The emulsifier is like a good song that comes on to make the boys and girls dance together!’ It was a brilliant ‘aha’ moment.”

Jordan Weymer, principal at McKay, loves these aha moments. He says that while they still use traditional substitutes — and stresses that they have several great regulars — he loves using Parachute teachers because “they provide students with an opportunity to experience things they hadn’t ever talked about before.” One Parachute sub brought in a 3-D printer. Another had students do yoga and learn about mindfulness. During one of Daniels’ recent classes, Weymer watched as students learned that their neighborhood is a food desert — an urban area without many fresh food options. “It was different from what they normally learn. The kids loved it.”

#### WHY IT’S NEEDED

Parachute may have come at just the right time. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of May 2015, about 626,750 substitute teachers are hired annually to cover days when regular teachers are sick, at the dentist, observing a religious holiday, dealing with a family emergency, or attending professional development. Estimates show that, on average, teachers are out about nine to 10 days during a 180-day year. However, a 2016 *Education Week* study found that nationally, 27 percent of preK-12 teachers were absent for more than 10 school days in 2013-14. Teachers in Hawaii topped the chart at 75 percent absent for more than 10 days, followed by Nevada at 49 percent. Last year, in Providence, Rhode Island, where Cherry Rice is hoping to work next, 47 percent of teachers were out for more than 18 days per year.

The logistics of replacing these teachers, as Cherry Rice learned from talks with principals, was often a huge hassle. Although some bigger districts have online systems for requesting a sub, typically, Cherry Rice says, “A principal would call Central. Someone would pull out a Rolodex and start calling people and then wait for them to call back.”

**\$105**

AVERAGE DAILY PAY FOR  
SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS IN THE U.S.

Too often, they don't call back or already have plans, leaving schools shorthanded. In Boston, Cherry Rice says the district needs about 200 subs a day, and "there are about 30 schools in the district that can't even get people because of the shortage and because some subs only want to teach in certain schools." Schools have even resorted to housing several classes of students in the gym all day with one teacher.

More often than not, other adults in the building fill in the gaps.

"We actually had a protocol for this it was so frequent," Sparks says. "First, the grade chair would disperse the class into other classrooms on the grade level. If there were too many students, a member of my leadership team would teach the class. If folks' schedules were too loaded, I would generally teach the class. To be sure, I enjoyed doing this and did it often; however, I'm still not confident that the lack of preparation benefitted students in the same way a prepared substitute would be with a great lesson and passion for the subject."

It's even a strain on the regular teacher trying to take a day off as he or she scrambles beforehand prepping curriculum for a regular substitute to use.

As a result, "there are a lot of teachers who come to work sick because it's more work to take a day off," Sparks says. "It's really a three-day ordeal: prepping for the substitute the day before, the day you're out, and the next day getting things back on track. That's a lot of stress on teachers. I want them instead to know that if you want to take a day off, we have an awesome teacher lined up."

Research has also found that teacher absences can affect student achievement.

"On average, it's a six-month loss" of learning over the course of a student's career, says Cherry Rice, "but in urban areas, it can be as high as a year." Even 10 days of teacher absences can have an impact, Miller and former Ed School professors Richard Murnane and John Willett found in 2007, reducing, for example, students' math achievement by 3.3 percent of a standard deviation.

And the cost isn't cheap. In 2012, in a report for the Center for American Progress, Miller estimated that the cost of substitute teachers and related administrative expenses across the country added up to at least \$4 billion annually.

Luckily, another unique feature of Parachute is that it doesn't cost schools any more than they are already spending on subs.

"We tap into the money they have already set aside for substitutes," Cherry Rice says. Parachute subs are paid the district-set rate for traditional subs. "And there's more flexibil-



**"I STARTED INTERVIEWING PEOPLE, AND IT TURNS OUT BOSTON HAS AN INCREDIBLE ECOSYSTEM OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERTISE AND WANT TO BE IN SCHOOLS, BUT THERE HASN'T BEEN A CLEAR PATHWAY TO COME INTO SCHOOLS."**

Sarah Cherry Rice, left

ity" with payments, she says. "A school might only need someone for an hour. However, in Boston, and most districts, you have to pay regular substitutes for the full day. Teachers need that flexibility, like anyone would want in their job, but principals can't provide it." Parachute teachers can be hired for just one class — and for those juggling several part-time jobs or needing to get back to the office, this is preferred. Cherry Rice says she is also looking into grants that schools can use to buy materials for Parachute teachers to use.

#### WHAT'S AHEAD

Now in its second year, with about 150 substitutes in its queue, Parachute has added a new — and teachers say much-needed — feature: more training, using something called microcredentialing. While some districts do require a few hours training (usually online), traditional substitutes often get little to no training before stepping into a classroom — certainly a far cry from the amount of time it takes to become a certified full-time teacher. This doesn't make any sense, says Jim Politis,

**626,750**

NUMBER OF SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS NEEDED ANNUALLY IN THE U.S.

**27**

PERCENT OF PREK-12 TEACHERS WHO MISSED MORE THAN 10 SCHOOL DAYS IN 2013-14

president of the nonprofit National Substitute Teachers Alliance (NSTA).

"NSTA believes this is a serious mistake," he says. "Substituting, like teaching in general, is as much art as science. Brain surgery, welding, and shoe repair each require specialized training. So does successful substitute teaching."

Parachute teachers receive about three hours of basic training to start, before the microcredentialing, and in addition to what the district might require.

"We bring them in for a crash course on things like lesson planning, classroom management 101, and how to own your presence in the classroom," says Sparks, who helped develop the training program. "This is the first step to becoming a Parachute substitute, which is one step more than most substitute teachers get."

Daniels remembers her first day as a Parachute teacher at McKay. She had plenty of experience working with kids in afterschool settings, but never in a classroom setting.

"It was a nervous day. My very first lesson was very ambitious," she says. "One of my other gigs is teaching at Tufts, so I'm used to college students. This was a class of sixth-graders, many non-English speakers. I later realized that probably a lot of what I was saying was going over their heads. I've since learned a lot, especially to quickly assess what kids know."

Her initial training helped, but as she told Cherry Rice, she needed a bigger tool kit. "She was hearing the same sentiment from other Parachute teachers. Now Sarah's developing microcredentials to do that and also to build in incentives to be a better teacher: earning more badges translates into more bookings and feeling better trained," Daniels says.

These badges are a way to fine-tune teaching skills — skills that people without classroom experience might not think much about or know how to approach, like how to build relationships with students you've just met or how to make sure your lesson plan stretches the full 55-minute block. Often described as bite-sized skill development, microcredentialing "sets Parachute teachers apart from traditional substitute teachers," Sparks says. "The badges are the things that a principal can say, 'Oh, this teacher has a five-star rating and those credentials,' which allows for some choice for the principal. And since students spend so much time with substitutes, it's important for those folks to constantly be learning and improving their craft. That only makes sense."

The first two badges offered this past summer were "urban farming" and "facilitator of learning." Future microcredentials might focus on specific areas of interest to teachers:

classroom management or curriculum development, for example. Daniels ran the urban farming session with 11 attendees this summer at the Harvard iLab, where Cherry Rice initially worked on the idea for Parachute and where Parachute continues to be part of the lab's Venture Incubation Program. Daniels says more potential Parachute teachers wanted in.

"I have a waitlist for the next training," she says. "A lot of people who are interested have a lot of experience with food systems or nutrition or farming and are passionate about sharing it with students," especially during the cold months, when not much is growing in New England. "They want to be substitutes, but they don't have school experience."

During the first training, Daniels shared tips and lessons she's honed so far as a Parachute teacher — the things you can't learn from a manual or online training course.

"I told them, these are good questions to ask on your first day at a school. Here's a great list of things to bring to class," she says. "Here's a lesson I did that flopped or one that worked really well." The course is about 8 to ten hours of work, which includes videos to watch, articles to read, and in-person training at the iLab on topics like behavior management and how to problem solve on the fly. Students had to submit a completed lesson plan.

Cherry Rice says she's happy with what they've achieved so far, focusing on one urban district, but looking forward she wants to figure out how to expand the model to other high-needs areas.

"What does it look like to scale this?" she says. "That's our big focus."

Daniels, too, sees the potential in expanding — especially for the students.

"You're bringing in something kids wouldn't have exposure to or limited exposure," she says. "It's something different and enriching. So you're immediately received positively by kids. We're working with teachers on how to get the attention of the kids, that you need a hook. For me, people love food. When I first started, I wanted to get to know the students. I went into the lunchroom and asked questions, got to see who they were." Eventually, she says, she knew it was working when other kids in the lunchroom asked who she was. "And then they started asking, 'Can you come to my class?'"

LORY HOUGH IS THE EDITOR IN CHIEF OF HARVARD ED.



LEARN MORE: [PARACHUTETEACHERS.COM](http://PARACHUTETEACHERS.COM). FOLLOW THEM ON TWITTER: [@PARACHUTETEACH](https://twitter.com/parachuteteach)

# Rethink the **Gap**



DO ALTERNATIVE GAP-YEAR PROGRAMS HAVE LESSONS FOR TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES? STORY BY **BRENDAN PELSUE**

ILLUSTRATION BY BEN KIRCHNER



Malia Obama, right, accepted to Harvard College, decided to delay her start date and instead take a gap year.



ON MAY 1, 2016, THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST Lady announced that Malia Obama would take a gap year. The first family's personal choices have a tendency to serve as national Rorschach blots, dredging up our hidden feelings about everything from organic vegetables to Portuguese water dogs, and this was no exception. Malia's gap year was "Part of a Growing (and Expensive) Trend," ran a headline in *The New York Times*. It was "The Ultimate Sign of Luxury," read an opinion piece in the *New York Post*. An editorial in *The Telegraph* thought Malia was "right" to take a gap year while *The Atlantic* pointed out that students who take time off after high school have a lower chance of completing college. NPR, PBS, and *The Guardian* all did segments. Everyone, it seemed, had an opinion about what it means to take time away from school.

The national spotlight is shining on gap years at what might be a watershed moment for the trend even without the Obamas' help. By some estimates, the number of "gappers," or students who take gap years, has doubled in the past 10 years, though exact figures are hard to pin down. Partly, that's because the term is loosely defined. In the common lexicon, a gap year is time off from formal education, most

commonly between high school and college. But the American Gap Association, an accreditation organization founded in 2012, advocates thinking of gap years not as "time off," but as "an experiential semester or year 'on,' taken to deepen practical, professional, and personal awareness." The number of gappers is impossible to measure — it can be hard to know how many high school seniors who delay college will enroll eventually and how many are ending their formal educations. Still, colleges are seeing more students defer admission, and there are now 38 national gap-year informational fairs annually, up from seven in 2008. Harvard College has encouraged the practice for decades, and Princeton, Tufts, and the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill have all recently launched programs that help incoming students participate in gap years.

Media debate around gap years typically revolves around economics. Does what's good for the few, the questioning usually goes, come at the exclusion of the many? According to this line of thinking there are gap-year advocates, like **BOB CLAGETT, ED.M.'91**, who has done studies showing that gap-year alumni outperform their peers in college, who nonetheless worry that high-profile gappers like Malia Obama contribute to the "widespread perception that gap-year experiences are the delaying of the rich and famous." (Advocates argue that gap years are in fact more affordable than they seem at first glance.) And then there are gap-year critics, like Senior Lecturer Mandy Savitz-Romer, who point to data indicating that time away from school reduces the chances that students — especially those from first-generation and lower-income backgrounds — will ultimately complete their degrees. They are wary of a world where gap years become like French horn solos, spots on the fencing team, or any of the other feats privileged high schoolers use to pad their resumes: "one more thing," Savitz-Romer says, "for less-advantaged students not to know about and not to have."

But this easy division into pro and con, have and have-not, glosses over some of the subtler thinking occurring across the gap-year world. **ROBIN PENDOLEY, ED.M.'03**, cofounder of Thinking Beyond Borders (TBB), a gap-year program focused on international development, advocates for another lens on the situation. He agrees that questions of economics and equity are essential in any discussion of gap years, but he also believes there is a breakdown in how our education system prepares most high school students for adulthood — and that gap-year programs offer clues toward a corrective of this breakdown.

**"We currently see increasing rates of depression, substance abuse, sexual assault, et cetera," on college campuses. "And a key component is students are going to campus with no purpose and direction around their learning, with no sense of what it means to be an adult."**

**ROBIN PENDOLEY, ED.M.'03,**  
COFOUNDER OF THINKING BEYOND BORDERS

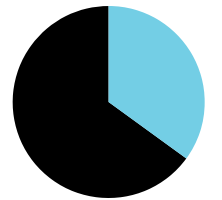
"We currently see increasing rates of depression, substance abuse, sexual assault, et cetera," on college campuses, Pendoley says. "And a key component is students are going to campus with no purpose and direction around their learning, with no sense of what it means to be an adult, and so students are getting lost in destructive behavior because they don't have the support to step into a higher ed community." The best gap-year programs, he believes, provide students with the independence, curiosity, and sense of purpose to help them negotiate this predicament. These qualities, he says, can also be fostered at traditional high schools and colleges though this will require deep changes to the ways that many institutions approach their missions.

Gap years, in other words, might be more than simply time for self-discovery or unaffordable luxuries. They might be laboratories where educators can ask the kinds of big questions that are becoming increasingly difficult to consider in the results-driven worlds of high school and college: What makes students genuinely curious? What kind of adults do we want our education system to help create? And how do we get there?

Gap years could hold clues to big changes.

## When

PENDOLEY ENROLLED AT THE ED SCHOOL AS a special studies master's student in the fall of 2002, the term "gap year" was just entering the American vocabulary (mostly thanks to Prince William's high-profile, post-Eton stint teaching in Chile), but the phenomenon had been around under other names for decades.



**55%**

gappers attended private school  
(Based on a 2014–15 survey  
by the American Gap Association  
of 558 gap-year alumni)

**“Part of the problem of our current approach is that we teach theory. Writing is theory. Literature is theory. Students aren’t out in the real world engaging and grappling with the engagement.”**

ROBIN PENDOLEY

HOLLY BULL, ED.M.:94, says her father, Cornelius, had banked on “interim year” or “interim time” when he founded the Center for Interim Programs, the country’s first gap-year counseling organization, in 1980. After two formative gap years of her own, Bull eventually joined her father at Interim, where she is now president. In the past 30 years, she says she has seen gap years grow from limited beginnings at private schools on the East Coast into a national trend — mostly, she says, because both parents and children increasingly see the value in putting students “at the reins,” in a position to decide what is of value to them and what is not, before starting college.

Those decades of gap-year growth were far from Pendoley’s mind when he graduated from the Ed School and began working in public schools in and around Boston. He loved the work and eventually became a middle school coordinator at a Montessori charter school in Newburyport, Massachusetts, but found the emphasis on grades and test scores made it difficult for students to engage directly and “authentically” with their world and their interests. “Part of the problem of our current approach is that we teach theory,” he says. “Writing is theory. Literature is theory. Students aren’t out in the real world engaging and grappling with the engagement.” That trajectory continues through the end of high school, and then students enter college, where “there are mountains and mountains of learning opportunities ... and your success on campus is dependent on your ability to chart a course for yourself.” A tall order, he says, when your academic life until that point has given you little chance to engage your curiosity.

In the summer of 2005, Pendoley took a job leading a summer program in Costa Rica for Rustic Pathways, a company that organizes travel and service programs for high school students. There, he connected with Chris Stakich, a Harvard College alum who asked Pendoley if he wanted to help him create a study abroad program for high school students. At

first, Pendoley demurred, but soon they met Sandy Cooper, a former Peace Corps volunteer and Americorps team leader, and the conversation got bigger. How, they all wondered, could international education create really meaningful change?

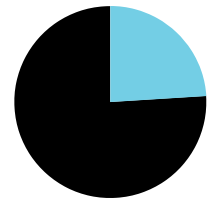
They found their answer in gap years. The market was growing and offered a chance to innovate outside the confines of traditional educational institutions. “We could create the curriculum, and we could create the pedagogy,” Pendoley says. By spring of 2007, they quit their full-time jobs to design a program that would foster three values they believed were common to great change-makers throughout history: a sense of purpose, a capacity for humble learning, and higher-order empathy.

In fall 2008, Thinking Beyond Borders (TBB) launched its first offering, Global Gap Year. Students visited nine countries over 35 weeks, studying poverty, sustainability, and equity. Since then, Global Gap Year has evolved somewhat (it’s now six countries in 28 weeks), and TBB has launched semester-long programs as well, one focused on food security and public health in Asia and another focused on empowerment and sustainability in South America.

Despite its focus on international development, TBB is not a social change organization. Pendoley says that too often travel programs for young people fall into the trap of “voluntourism,” a combination of sightseeing and light manual labor that assuages the first-world guilt of the volunteers but does little to change the structural problems that create poverty in the first place. At TBB, as students travel, they observe, listen, and repeatedly ask, “What is development?” — a question that inevitably leads to a number of subtopics: What should my role be in development? What systems create poverty in the world today? How am I complicit in those systems? Whose responsibility is it to fix the situation?

For TBB students, this self-reflection can be profoundly shaking. Alexandra Duncan, an alumna of TBB’s first Global Gap Year, says she began her time at TBB “hoping to save the world” and left having no idea how to do so. What, as the program asked, was development? How could it be done right? Was she even sure it was her responsibility? “I had to start from scratch,” she says. “I had to find one thing I knew was right, which was doing no harm, and go from there.” That led her down an unexpected path: After TBB, she went to Tufts, then took time off to train as a doula. She eventually graduated from New York University and founded Praxis Clinical, a New Haven, Connecticut-based medical training company.

Harvard Ed.



24%

said their parents or peers influenced their decision to take a gap year



TBB: MARTHA STEWART; JILL ANDERSON

**“The problem isn’t a lack of facilities or experts.” The problem is “we don’t have a group of students prepared to step on campus and chart a course that is meaningful for themselves.”**

ROBIN PENDOLEY

When Duncan arrived at Tufts in the fall of 2009, she noticed commonalities among the students who had taken gap years. “We had a clearer sense of what we wanted from our education,” she says. Research confirms her observations. In 2011–12, while dean of admissions at Middlebury College in Vermont, Clagett studied the college careers of gap-year alumni. Using methodology developed with Ed School Lecturer Terrence Tivnan, he compared the “academic rating” that admissions officers assign to applicants (a combination of grades, test scores, teacher recommendations, etc.) with their actual academic performance once they enrolled at Middlebury. Gap years, he found, were a better predictor of academic performance than SAT or ACT scores for all four years of college, and that was true whether the students “spent \$40,000 or flipped hamburgers.” Clagett speculates this is because gap years allow students to make connections between life and education, two circles of experience that, for many high schoolers, barely overlap at all. Clagett thinks this schism is partly responsible for what he calls the “infantile behavior” of many college students. That’s difficult to prove, of course, but his study does give empirical backing to Pendoley’s hunch: that there are better ways to help our young people transition to independence than we are currently providing.

**If**

THE BENEFITS OF GAP YEARS ARE WELL documented, the barriers to participation remain high. The American Gap Association says that 84 percent of gappers are white (compared with 50 percent of students enrolled in

public high schools nationally) and 18 percent come from households that earn more than \$200,000 annually. Many programs, including TBB, offer need-based scholarships, but accessing those funds requires both information and guidance, a tall order in urban schools where a single college counselor can have 700 students on his or her caseload. There are cheaper ways to take time off—paid volunteer programs like Americorps and City Year are often described as “funded” gap years—but Pendoley believes that “unless there is a major change in how we fund undergraduate education,” gappers will never account for more than 3 to 4 percent of the college-bound population.

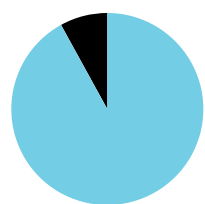
He also thinks, however, that the demonstrated benefits of gap years can be created in other ways. “A more intentional approach to the college transition is important,” he says, and the gap-year world offers clues about how that could happen. Specifically, Pendoley says that effective gap-year programs (and he is quick to point out that not all gap-year programs are, by his definition, effective) give students two key opportunities they aren’t finding at school. The first is a chance to engage with the real-world questions that feel burning to them. In contrast, many high school and even college course loads are about mastering pre-existing bodies of knowledge rather than engaging curiosity. The second is an adult mentor who can help students reflect on fundamental questions like who am I? Who do I want to be? How do I get there? Students arriving in college encounter new levels of personal and academic choice, but lack trusted, nonparental role models to help them navigate this enormous freedom.

“The problem isn’t a lack of facilities or experts,” Pendoley says. The problem is “we don’t have a group of students prepared to step on campus and chart a course that is meaningful for themselves.”

On one level, the change Pendoley hopes for is programmatic. He would like to see more colleges offer freshman study abroad—focused, small-group trips designed to get students to think about what they want from their college experience before they arrive on campus. And he would like to see similar programs on campus. Perhaps students could spend their first semester in small groups, meeting all day every day with a single professor to engage deeply in a topic that relates to the world around them, like gentrification, social class in America, or public health.

On another level, however, Pendoley knows the change he is describing will mean going deeper than alterations to the curriculum. It

Harvard Ed.



**1%**

said they were likely to recommend taking a gap year to others



TBB: KATHLEEN DOOHER

## “I’m not an advocate for gap years. I’m an advocate for meaningful and intentional spaces in the college transition.”

ROBIN PENDOLEY

will mean getting schools to be explicit about the purpose of higher education, which he sees as “trying to prepare students for fulfilling lives and careers that contribute to a better world.” He knows that some academics focused primarily on scholarship will disagree with that assertion — the debate over whether universities exist primarily to create fulfilled citizens or to advance knowledge is not a new one — but he does see most of higher education “stumbling” toward something like what he describes, even if “we are missing some of the tools to get there.”

Those tools, however, seem to be appearing. In the last decade or so, colleges and universities have incorporated many new learning models. In 2009, Princeton launched the Bridge Year Program, a tuition-free nine-month international service program for incoming freshman. In 2015, Tufts started a 1+4 program, which extends university financial aid to students looking to fund service years before starting college. In 2016, with the help of **MADÉLAINE EULICH, ED.M.’16**, the College for Social Innovation launched Semester in the City, a 15-week program where college juniors receive college credit and financial aid while working in social impact organizations in greater Boston. Some gap programs, like LEAPNOW, are affiliated with universities, which means students graduate with transferable college credits and are eligible for Federal Student Aid under Title IV. Ethan Knight, the head of the American Gap Association, is working with the Lumina Foundation to develop “a more universally applicable method for transcribing experiential learning,” which he hopes will help gap programs meet Pell Grant documentation requirements.

Some in the gap-year world are skeptical of too much integration with traditional education (Knight wonders if, perhaps, gap years need to “stand apart” to be effective), but Savitz-Romer says that these efforts are actually

essential to democratize the trend. She cites evidence that delaying college raises the likelihood that lower-income students won’t complete their degrees at all and wonders if the term “gap” in “gap year” implies that college is the inevitable next step after high school, an assumption that tilts towards privileged students. She advocates for thinking in terms of “bridge years,” which she describes as high school-college transition experiences supported by existing educational institutions. As examples, she cites the Myra Kraft Transitional Year Program at Brandeis University, which gives students who haven’t had access to AP and honors courses a year of academics designed to prepare them for advanced undergraduate level coursework, and Northeastern University’s Foundation Year, a similar program for students living in Boston. These programs are not categorized as gap years because “they’re designed for lower-income students,” Savitz-Romer says. But “there is an opportunity to reconceive what we think of as gap years. ... We could broaden the definition a little bit and in doing so we could also learn something from these programs because they have something to teach us by being tied to institutions already.”

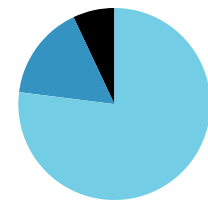
For Pendoley, any and all of these efforts could be an important part of transforming a higher-education system where “the cost no longer reflects the value.” Gap years are among the places where it’s currently possible to experiment with remedies to this problem, to try new ways of mentoring, of allowing students to ask questions, of engaging real curiosity. If the gap world’s capacity for experimentation changes, Pendoley’s focus might change as well.

“I’m not an advocate for gap years,” he says. “I’m an advocate for meaningful and intentional spaces in the college transition.” The real challenge, he believes, is not to provide more graduating high school students with exotic travel experiences. It’s to find better ways for our society to manage one of life’s most essential rites of passage — the journey to adulthood.

**BRENDAN PELSUE** IS A WRITER BASED IN NEW YORK. HIS LAST PIECE FOR *ED.* PROFILED THE LANDMARK SCHOOL.



READ A LONGER STORY ABOUT THE LAUNCH OF THINKING BEYOND BORDERS: [GSE.HARVARD.EDU/EXTRAS](http://GSE.HARVARD.EDU/EXTRAS)



77%

took their gap year between high school and college (16% took a gap year during a leave of absence from college, 5% after college, 2% before career/no college)

# Grad.

**“I don’t think that anyone stays in this field of education — I’ve been at Harvard for 40 years — unless her temperament and stance are hopeful and determined, unless she can find a way to resist cynicism and blame, and cultivate searching questions and imaginative thinking. I, for one, refuse to be cynical about teachers and children and about the capacity of these folks to do good work.”**

**SARA LAWRENCE-LIGHTFOOT, ED.D.’72,** IN A *HARVARD GAZETTE* Q&A ABOUT HER LIFE AND CAREER



Illustration by Riccardo Vecchio

IN MEMORY

1950–1959

CHARLES PHILLIPS, M.A.T.'51  
 THOMAS GRAVES JR., GSE'52  
 COAN (BELL) HANSON, M.A.T.'52  
 EDMUND GLEAZER JR., ED.D.'53  
 JOAN HERRIGAN, M.A.T.'53  
 ALICE FRAENKEL, M.A.T.'54  
 VIVIENNE KALMAN, ED.M.'54  
 JILL COGAN, ED.M.'55  
 VIRGINIA JOHNSON, M.A.T.'55  
 LORRAINE GREENSPAN, ED.M.'56  
 SYLVIA MENDENHALL, M.A.T.'56  
 DOROTHY (DUTTON) SCOTT, M.A.T.'56  
 FREDERICK DANKER, M.A.T.'57  
 MARY (ALFORD) WILLIAMS, M.A.T.'57  
 MARY ANNE LADD, ED.M.'58  
 SAMUEL POWERS, ED.M.'58  
 RUTH (GRIFFITH) SHOLES, ED.M.'59  
 ANN WHITTIER, ED.M.'59

1960–1969

ELGIN BOYCE JR., M.A.T.'60  
 RUDOLPH CARCHIDI, ED.M.'61  
 BARD (ROGERS) HAMLIN, M.A.T.'61  
 STUART DECOVSKY, M.A.T.'62  
 ROBERT SHIVELY, ED.M.'62  
 HELEN POPP, ED.M.'60, ED.D.'64  
 MICHAEL CURLEY, M.A.T.'65  
 DENNIS WALSH, M.A.T.'66

1970–1979

SALLY LUNT, ED.D.'74  
 JAMES SLATTERY, ED.D.'74  
 EDWARD TAYLOR, ED.M.'75  
 MARTIN HUNT, ED.D.'76  
 JUNE BARNHART, ED.M.'78  
 DONALD BURGESS, ED.M.'78  
 JANET BAKER-CARR, ED.M.'79  
 MARGARET CESARIO, ED.M.'79  
 DOROTHY FRAUENHOFER, ED.D.'79

1980–1989

JAMES CURLEY, ED.M.'82  
 JOSEPH JACKSON, C.A.S.'83  
 FREDERICK GREENE, ED.M.'84  
 SHER LAKHANI, ED.M.'89  
 DAVID LUSTICK, ED.M.'89

1990–1999

RUTH TROMETER, ED.M.'92  
 ULLA MALKUS, ED.D.'95

1952

**William Forbush**, M.A.T., writes that following his time at the Ed School, he was in the U.S. Medical Corps and then served as a teacher administrator and acting head of Friends Academy in Locust Valley, New York. He received a doctor of education in 1960 from Columbia University and was headmaster of the Friends School in Baltimore from 1960 to 1998. More recently, Forbush served as board chair, trustee, and archivist at Sheppard Pratt Health System.

1961

**Dwight Wall**, M.A.T., retired after 53 years teaching English and AP literature at Greenwich [Connecticut] High School. For many years, he was also the faculty adviser to the *Beak*, the student newspaper. Prior, he taught at East Hartford High School.

1962

**Vaughn Nelson**, Ed.M, retired as dean of the Research and Information Technology Graduate School at West Texas A&M University in 2001 and continued as director of the Alternative Energy Institute until 2003. He has written several books on renewable energy, bioenergy, and wing energy. This year, he took up quilting; many of his pieces have a science or math motif.

1971

**Mary Clare (Hummer) Decker**, M.A.T., is no longer teaching but is working full time as an attorney for Deloitte LLP in Boston. Her husband of 42 years, Michael, died April 29, 2015. She writes that their three daughters are great companions, and the growing family now includes four grandchildren with another on the way. She lives in Chestnut

Hill, Massachusetts, and would be “delighted” to see any Ed School alumni in the area.

**Jane (Kamps) Strauss**, M.A.T., was elected last summer as vice chair to the Fairfax [Connecticut] County School Board. She is a former elementary and preschool teacher.

1975

**Harold Goldmeier**, Ed.D., published an ebook this past summer, *Healthcare Insights: Better Care Better Business*. He writes that he is currently teaching international university students in Tel Aviv, Israel. [hgoldmeier.wordpress.com](http://hgoldmeier.wordpress.com).

1976

**Dvora Yanow**, Ed.M., was awarded a fellowship at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research in Duisburg, Germany,



Tazi Lee O’Hair, class of 2038, son of **Grace Lee**, Ed.M., can’t contain his joy over the summer 2016 issue of *Harvard Ed*.

which is affiliated with the University of Duisburg-Essen. The fellowship runs through March 2017. While there, she is working on a book on race-ethnic categories and immigrant integration policy.

1979

**Heather Weiss**, Ed.M.'71, Ed.D., recently published *Family Engagement in the Digital Age: Early Childhood Educators as Media Mentors*. Weiss is founder of the Global Family Research Project.

1981

**James Meredith Day**, Ed.M., is a professor of human development and the psychology of religion in the faculty of psychology and educational sciences at the Université Catholique de Louvain in Belgium. He is also an associate of the Taos

Institute, research fellow in the Center on Terrorism at the John Jay College at CUNY, a visiting professor at the University of Uppsala, a fellow of the German Science Foundation Moral Psychology Group, and a licensed psychologist in clinical practice at Psygroup in Brussels. Day’s work has been published in many scholarly journals, including the *Behavioral Development Bulletin*. He is the father of three living children: Julia, Jonathan, and Jacob.

1985

**Kate Jamentz**, Ed.M.'84, Ed.D., was honored by the Fremont Union High School District in northern California by having an award named after her: the Dr. Kate Jamentz Award: Ensuring Excellence Through Collegial Collaboration. The award will honor teams of district teachers who have successfully collaborated on a

common goal. Jamentz has been a teacher, administrator, curriculum consultant, and academic deputy superintendent.

**Nancy Traina-Sulek**, Ed.M., was appointed development officer at Volunteers in Medicine Hilton Head Island, the free health care clinic in Hilton Head, South Carolina.

1986

**Anthony Baxter**, Ed.M., recently published *From Prisoner to PhD: Reflections on My Pathway to Desistance from Crime and Addiction*.

**Elena DeVos**, Ed.M.'83, Ed.D., edited the book *An Unlikely Strength: Tourette Syndrome and the Search for Happiness in 60 Voices*, a collection of stories about how Tourette syndrome affects the lives of adults and children. As she wrote in a review of the book, “The 60 voices tell of doctors who understood them, and those who didn’t. Of schools that took them seriously and those who let bullying occur. Parents share their techniques for dealing with the medical and educational professionals. Every person’s stark individuality strikes readers, along with the commonalities we all share, as humans.”

1989

**Rick Rogers**, C.A.S., became executive director of the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals’ Association.

He served as an elementary school principal for 27 years in four schools in both urban and suburban Massachusetts. He says he is “passionate about the principalship” and committed to providing principals professional learning and support. He is deeply grateful to the Ed School, particularly to Roland Barth, for the preparation he received to be a school leader.

1990

**Elaine Brzycki**, Ed.M., recently published *Student Success in Higher Education: Developing the Whole Person through High-Impact Practices* (see page 17), which introduces a new model for student success based on the psychology of well being and student-centered learning. The book represents the mission of The Center for the Self in Schools, which she co-founded with her husband, to impact the emotional, psychological, and physical well-being of young people through education. She writes, “I am looking forward to partnering with like-minded alums, sharing our vision for the transformative effect that education can have on young people’s health and well-being. Always happy to hear from alums at: [Elaine@Brzyckigroup.com](mailto:Elaine@Brzyckigroup.com).”

1991

**Stacy Scott**, Ed.M.'86, Ed.D., superintendent of schools in Framingham, Massachusetts, was named to the

# Inspirational. Practical. Grounded in Research.

Explore more than 70 programs for preK-12 and higher education professionals.

[hgse.me/ppe\\_ed](http://hgse.me/ppe_ed)



Professional Education



GRACE LEE

## THE 1-QUESTION INTERVIEW: RICK ROGERS, C.A.S.'89

**Q** WHY DO PRINCIPALS NEED LEADERSHIP COACHING?

**A** Being an effective principal is complex. The question is: How do you develop leaders who can thrive in difficult and constantly shifting environments? Coaching can help principals reduce what [researchers] Pfeffer and Sutton call the “knowing-doing” gap and provides support for principals committed to continuous improvement and meaningful change. Coaching is beneficial for all school leaders, not just those who are new or struggling. Even Tom Brady has a quarterback coach!



board of directors for Inversant, a Boston-based nonprofit that helps families learn about and save for a college education.

1992

**Joseph Arthur Kennedy, Ed.M.**, was named assistant professor of English recently at Francis Marion University in Florence, South Carolina.

1994

**Angela Gonzales, Ed.M.**, joined Arizona State University this past fall. She was a professor of development sociology and indigenous studies at Cornell University. Gonzales is an enrolled member of the Hopi nation.

1997

**Phyllis Harnick, Ed.M.**, was promoted to assistant commissioner

of higher education for planning at the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner. She has worked at the office and its predecessor agency, the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education, since 1998.

**Michael Moody, Ed.M.**, recently launched a new edtech firm, Insight ADVANCE, based in Encino, California. The organization supports teachers through video-based feedback and instructional coaching.

**Karen Richardson, Ed.M.**, was named dean of undergraduate admissions for the School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Engineering at Tufts University, where she has worked since 2008. She was director of graduate admissions and previously worked as assistant dean for undergraduate admissions at Princeton and in the Boston Public Schools.

1998

**Brian Buckley, Ed.M.**, joined the board of trustees of the Shining Mountain Waldorf School in Boulder, Colorado. His three daughters, Norah (9), Clare (6), and Ruby (4), all attend the school.

**Carol Watson-Phillips, Ed.M.**, published "Relational Fathering: Sons Liberate Dads" in the October 2016 issue of the *Journal of Men's Studies*. The article was an outgrowth of her presentation on relational fathering at the International Conference on Men and Masculinities in New York City in 2015.

1999

**Seán Delaney, Ed.M.**, recently published a guidebook for teachers, *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have* (see page 17). Delaney was a primary school

teacher for 11 years in Kilkenny, Ireland. More recently, he was appointed as a mathematics educator at the Marino Institute of Education in Dublin. He completed his Ph.D. at the University of Michigan in 2008. Delaney has a blog (*seandelaney.com*) and podcast (*seandelaney.com/podcasts/*).

2000

**Rose DiSanto, Ed.M.**, gave the address at the University of Delaware's Department of Art & Design 2016 convocation ceremony. DiSanto, a graduate of the University of Delaware, challenged graduates to use their art-making to do something for someone else. She is a volunteer at Children's Hospital Boston and at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashford, Connecticut.

2001

**Jen Johnson, Ed.M.**, is a writer whose pen name is J.J. Johnson. She has written three young adult novels, including the most recent, *Believarexic*, and is an active blogger: *jjjohnsonauthor.com/blog*.

2002

**Seeta Pai, Ed.M.'94, Ed.D.**, joined the national educational advisory board at the Goddard School, an organization of preschools around the country. She is currently an independent research and strategy consultant focused on children, families, and education. Prior, she was vice president of research for Common Sense Media and a senior director of research at Sesame Workshop.

2003

**Stephen Bunch, Ed.M.**, was appointed by Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe to the board of visitors of the College of William & Mary, located in Williamsburg, Virginia. Bunch is a partner at Cohen Milstein.

**Megan Gavin, Ed.M.**, published *Parental Participation in Honduran*

*Schools* in 2014. She writes that the book includes a foreword from the minister of education in Honduras and endorsements from international agencies and faculty from academic institutions.

**Ana Maria Schlecht, Ed.M.**, was named to the board of the Oak Harbor school district in Washington.

**Susan Stuebner, Ed.M.'98, Ed.D.**, was named president of Colby-Sawyer College in New London, New Hampshire. Prior, she was the executive vice president and chief operations officer at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania. She has also held posts at various colleges, including Lycoming, Dartmouth, Wheelock, Harvard, Albright, and Carleton.

2004



**Matt Aborn, Ed.M.**, his wife, Monica, and their daughter, Lone, announced the birth of their son (and brother), Augustine Lucien Aborn. He was born on April 3, 2016. Aborn writes, "The family could not be more excited to welcome this new little one into the world!"

**Rachael Bregman, Ed.M.**, is a rabbi at Temple Beth Tefilloh in Brunswick, Georgia. She was recently named one of "America's Most Inspiring 2016 Rabbis" by *Forward*.

2005

**Jose Cruz, Ed.M.**, executive director of the Barrio Logan College Institute

in San Diego, was recognized this past fall by the Council for Opportunity in Education as a national TRIO Achiever. The award was named for the federal TRIO college access and support programs that have been helping low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities succeed in college for more than 50 years.

**Max Klau, Ed.M.'00, Ed.D.**, recently became chief program officer at the New Politics Leadership Academy, a nonpartisan nonprofit that recruits and trains alumni of service programs, such as military veterans, as well as alumni of civilian programs like AmeriCorps and Peace Corps, to run for political office. His first book, *What's True About Race and Social Change?* will be published in the spring of 2017.

2006

**Wenli Jen, Ed.M.**, was appointed by the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to serve on the national advisory council for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration at the Center for Mental Health Services.

**Michelle Tiu, Ed.M.**, and **David Borrelli, Ed.M.**, were married in Big Sur, California. After living together in Hong Kong and San Francisco, they recently moved back to the Boston area, where they first met as students at the Ed School.

2007

**Valerie Li, Ed.M.**, recently became an assistant principal to be shared between two elementary schools: Snoqualmie and North Bend, both in Washington. Prior she was an autism facilitator and taught preschool in Washington.

**Jennifer (Heckathorn) Spong, Ed.M.**, was named assistant superintendent for instructional support services at the Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES, one of the boards



SPOTLIGHT 2007

**Rodolfo Rivarola, Ed.M.**, was appointed dean at IAE Business School in Argentina. Prior, he was director of the school's executive MBA school. He says he also designed a leadership program applying frameworks learned from Professor Bob Kegan and Kennedy School Lecturer Ronald Heifetz. He writes, "My wife, Lucia, and I have been applying all that we have learned in Cambridge in raising our six kids. (We had two more after coming back home.)" They live in Bella Vista, Argentina.

THE 1-QUESTION INTERVIEW: CAROL WATSON-PHILLIPS, ED.M.'98

Q WHAT IS RELATIONAL FATHERING?

A Relational fathers see fathering as a relationship rather than a role. They openly engage in mutually growth-fostering relationships with their sons. Such relationships are antidotes to destructive, stereotypical visions of manhood for both sons and fathers. As a result of being in connection with their sons, fathers reframe manhood as caring and masculinity as relationship. You can learn more on our website, *relationalfathering.org*.

Education needs more people like you.

Help us find others who share your passion for education.



[hgse.me/refer\\_ed](http://hgse.me/refer_ed)

Learn to Change the World



MATT ABORN: RODOLFO RIVAROLA

of cooperative educational services in New York state.

2008

**Chris Flieger**, Ed.M., was appointed principal of St. John the Evangelist School in Canton, Massachusetts. He was an associate superintendent for the Archdiocese of Boston.

2010

**Trevor Ivey**, Ed.M., was one of 36 national finalists last May for the Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship Award. In June, he was also named one of 50 in the 2016–17 cohort of Leadership South Carolina. This past September, Ivey was chosen for the 2016–17 South Carolina Education Policy Fellowship Program, a 10-month professional development program for emerging education leaders. Ivey is an assistant principal at the Alice Drive Middle School in Sumter, South Carolina.

2011

**Joy Ippolito**, Ed.M.'06, Ed.D., was recently named the anti-human trafficking coordinator for the State of Wisconsin in the Department of Children and Families. Since graduating from the Ed School, she has been conducting implementation and evaluation research at the University of Chicago and teaching human development for the Urban Teacher Education Program at the Urban Education Institute.

2012

**Allison Ashley**, Ed.M., a third-grade teacher at Becker Elementary in Austin, Texas, was named teacher of the year in Texas. Ashley has taught bilingual education for a decade.

**Sarah (Sprague) Katan**, Ed.M., married Chris Katan on July 9, 2016, in Rensselaer, New York. There to celebrate were fellow 2012 Ed.M. classmates **Scott Asakawa**, **Jo Schnitz**, and **Dora Lubin**.

2013

**Leslie Boozer**, Ed.M.'07, Ed.D., was appointed superintendent of Dublin Schools in Dublin, California. Prior, she was superintendent of the Fontana Unified School District. Boozer started her career in Ohio as a business litigation attorney. She is the founder of DiSanto Design: [disantodesign.com](http://disantodesign.com).

**Michele Elyse Shannon**, Ed.L.D., was promoted to chief of schools for Boston Public Schools. She oversees the team of instructional superintendents, formerly known as principal leaders, and supports principals and headmasters in their goal to eliminate the achievement gap. Previously she was an assistant superintendent of leadership development and has been a social worker, teacher, and principal.

**Blake Sims**, Ed.M., founded epic solutions, a program that teaches business concepts to Boston-area



**Emily Longenecker**, Ed.M., worked in Tbilisi, Georgia (above), for six weeks this past summer. She was part of a six-person team, put together by IREX, consulting for the Georgian Ministry of Education with the goal to make their education style less lecture and more participatory. She worked for IREX in Washington, D.C., for five years and is now a high school world history and geography teacher in Virginia.

teens to help them become creative innovators and entrepreneurs.

2014

**Darienne Driver**, Ed.M.06, Ed.D., superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools since 2014, had her contract extended through 2019. Prior, Diver was the district's chief innovation officer — the first person to hold the position.

2015

**Oluwanifemi Mabayoje**, Ed.M., was chosen by the Knowles Science

Teaching Foundation as a 2016 teaching fellow. Mabayoje is in her second year teaching physics at East Boston High School. During her first year, she helped started the school's STEM Pathway Program, allowing students to take at least five AP STEM courses and complete a capstone research project.

2016

**Maria Chal**, Ed.M., was chosen by the Knowles Science Teaching Foundation as a 2016 teaching fellow. Chal teaches biology at Cristo Rey High School in Boston.

EMILY LONGENECKER

# CHANGING THE WORLD THROUGH EDUCATION: EVERY GIFT MATTERS

Ok, so you don't plan on giving a million dollars. That's fine. But your smaller gift is still incredibly important to what we do at the Ed School. Your contribution helps a dedicated young teacher afford a master's in the Teacher Education Program so he can return to his urban high school as a teacher-leader. It pays for a doctoral student to research the effects of mobile technologies in the classroom. And it pays for a seasoned school leader who wants to sharpen her skills to be even more effective in her district.



MEET BEN WILD, ED.M.'16

**BEN WILD** (above) talks about why he recently gave to the HGSE Fund, which raises much-needed money for student financial aid.

Q WHY DID YOU GIVE WHILE YOU WERE STILL A STUDENT?

**A** I decided to contribute to the HGSE Fund and 2016 Class Gift after witnessing all the ways that the Ed School supports its students. I was lucky enough to receive a merit-based scholarship, the Leadership in Education Award, which was a wonderful surprise and tremendous vote of confidence from the school. More importantly, I've seen where the dollars are spent, and I've committed myself to supporting the school in whatever ways I can.

Q ADVICE FOR OTHER ALUMS THINKING ABOUT GIVING?

**A** I encourage alums to contribute because our participation, even if it's only a small amount, sends a strong message that

we believe in the work of the Ed School. Strong alumni participation encourages outside donors to write checks. Additionally, the opportunities made available to us as students were funded in part by student contributions. This is our opportunity to ensure that future Ed School students are supported in the same ways.

Q WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW THAT YOU'VE GRADUATED?

**A** I'm the executive director of the Walkabout Education Foundation, an organization that I started right before coming to the Ed School. I'm happy to say we're a far stronger organization as a result of my time there. Other Ed School alums have joined our team, we made it to the finals in the XQ Super School Competition, and we're getting close to launching our first school. I'm deeply grateful to the many ways that the Ed School has supercharged our work!

## THANKS, FAVORITE TEACHER

Dante Melotti, a history teacher at Marian High School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, most likely never expected to receive a letter last year from the Ed School telling him how much his teaching had affected one of his former students. But he got the letter, as part of the Ed School's Applaud an Educator Program, on behalf of **SARI WILSON, ED.M.'16**, who had contributed to the Class Gift Fund. (Any student who contributed at least \$50 was offered the chance to applaud a former teacher.)

Wilson says that Melotti was so happy when he got the letter that he called her during graduation week, saying, "It is certainly one of the greatest honors I have received as a teacher." Wilson had lunch with him this past summer when she went back to Michigan to become senior director of alumni affairs at IDEA. During lunch, Melotti gave her a matted and framed self-drawn print of Memorial Church in Harvard Yard in honor of her graduation. "I felt like Dante was returning the favor," she says, "to a fellow teacher."

An excerpt from Sari Wilson's Applaud an Educator letter:

*"For the past eight years, I have been a teacher, mentor, coach, and director, leading work to help more students access college and beyond. I can honestly say that my passion for education and the ways in which I approach my work came from my transformational ninth-grade world history class with Dante Melotti. Mr. Melotti believed in the power of voice. Instead of mere lecture, Dante pushed his students to think for themselves, formulate and defend opinions, and question all. Using the Socratic Method each class period, we would analyze historical perspectives from diverse viewpoints. ... I learned how to analyze problems, to create solutions, and to love the process of learning. Because of my experience in his class, I went on to participate in Model United Nations and study abroad in Italy, just to experience learning outside the four walls of a classroom. I am not sure he knows, but Mr. Melotti has been an incredible influence on my style of education. As a teacher in the Rio Grande Valley, I brought a piece of Dante Melotti to my classroom every day. While other teachers may have been lecturing, I frequently used the Socratic seminar method, getting my students to question, think, and believe. I also started the first Model UN program in rural South Texas, which has now grown to over eight different experiences outside of the classroom that push students to own their leadership and learning. These values came directly from my experiences in Dante's classroom."*

HOW CAN YOU HELP? LET ME COUNT THE INDIVIDUAL WAYS

1. **HGSE FUND:** Support financial aid for all Ed School students with a gift to the HGSE Fund.
2. **CLASS GIFT FUND:** Support financial aid specifically for the Class of 2018 with a gift to the Class Gift Fund.
3. **MARATHON CAMPAIGN FOR THE HGSE FUND:** Make a donation in honor of teachers and Dean Jim Ryan running the annual Boston Marathon. Money raised goes to the HGSE Fund.

TO GIVE: [gse.harvard.edu/givenow](http://gse.harvard.edu/givenow)  
FOR MORE INFORMATION: [hgse\\_fund@harvard.edu](mailto:hgse_fund@harvard.edu)

### THE 1-QUESTION INTERVIEW: BLAKE SIMS, ED.M.'13

Q WHERE DID THE PROGRAM'S NAME EPIIC, WITH TWO I'S, COME FROM?

**A** A friend and former IEP grad Mette Bohnstedt, Ed.M.'13, came up with the name epic solutions when piloting our content with Citizen Schools in Boston two years ago. It's an acronym for entrepreneurial, powerful, inspiring, innovative, and creative solutions. Coming up with a name is tricky, and this one stuck. It's fun and who doesn't want to be epic?!



Harvard Graduate School of Education  
Office of Communications  
13 Appian Way  
Cambridge, MA 02138

Nonprofit Organization  
U.S. Postage PAID  
Holliston, MA  
Permit No. 20

# This Winter on Campus

REMEMBER HOW MUCH YOU LOVED GOING TO ASKWITH FORUMS AND CAMPUS EVENTS? HERE'S A LIST OF A FEW FORUMS AND EVENTS COMING UP THIS SEMESTER, AS WELL AS INFORMATION ABOUT ONES YOU MAY HAVE MISSED IN THE FALL. MANY EVENTS CAN BE WATCHED ON CAMPUS IN ASKWITH HALL OR LIVE-STREAMED AT [YOUTUBE.COM/USER/HARVARDEDUCATION](https://www.youtube.com/user/harvardeducation). FOR AN UPDATED LISTING OF EVENTS, GO TO THE PUBLIC CALENDAR: [GSE.HARVARD.EDU/CALENDAR](https://gse.harvard.edu/calendar).

ASKWITH FORUMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

## ALUMNI OF COLOR CONFERENCE 2017

Join the Ed School community for the 15th annual Alumni of Color Conference (AOCC). This year's theme is "Define. Defy. Dismantle: Forging Our Legacy Through Activism."

MARCH 3 & 4

## A CONVERSATION WITH ANNE HOLTON

Anne Holton, former secretary of education in Virginia, sits down with Professor Deborah Jewell-Sherman for a conversation as part of the Ed School's Women in Leadership Institute.

MARCH 6

## A CONVERSATION WITH BEVERLY DANIEL TATUM

Beverly Daniel Tatum, former Spelman College president and recognized authority on racial issues, will headline the 35th anniversary celebration of the Principals' Center.

MARCH 21

## WHERE ARE ALL OF THE TEACHERS OF COLOR?

Did you miss this October Askwith panel discussion connected to the summer issue of *Ed.*? No worries. We've got you covered. Watch the video (and videos from other past forums) on-line any time.

[YOUTUBE.COM/USER/HARVARDEDUCATION](https://www.youtube.com/user/harvardeducation)