Fall/Winter 2024

The Magazine of the Harvard
Graduate School of Education

Ed.

Call Waiting...

Ed.
Fall/Winter 2024
Issue #175

Editor in Chief
Lory Hough
LORY_HOUGH@HARVARD.EDU

Creative Direction
MO.D
Patrick Mitchell
MODUSOP.NET

Writers
Andrew Bauld, Ed.M.'16
Elaine McArdle
Grace Tatter, Ed.M.'18
Bianca Turetsky

Illustrators
Hélène Builly
Martin Gee
Simone Massoni
Renaud Vigourt
Ping Zhu

Photographers
Jill Anderson
Sophie Fabbri
Winky Lewis
Simon Simard
Brad Trent

Copy Editors
Marin Jorgensen
Kymm Welle

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

Harvard Ed. magazine is published two times a year.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Cover illustration by Renaud Vigourt

What She Keeps

When I initially heard that Professor Catherine Snow was retiring at the end of this academic year after teaching at the Ed School for 45 years, my first thought was, "What is she going to do with all of the stuff in her office?"

A few years earlier, I had interviewed Snow in her office in Larsen for a story I was working on about exactly that — her office. I remember being in awe when I walked into the space. Her office is huge by academic standards. It's also filled with lots of things, including big bookshelves with not only books, but also little objects that she has collected or that have been given to her over the years, mostly from students.

I was there to learn about the objects, actually. I was writing a story for a fun series we were doing in the magazine at the time called "What They Keep," where we told the backstory of something in a faculty member's office.

With Snow, I focused on her collection of Eric Carle Happy Meal finger puppets that **MICHELLE PORCHE, ED.M.'90, ED.D.'99**, had given to her after they worked together on a long-term language study with 3-year-old children from low-income families. As part of the study, mothers were asked to read aloud Carle's book, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

When I interviewed Snow again for this issue, I asked about the stuffed office after she retires. She sighed and she, too, wondered what exactly she was going to do with it all. My guess? The fingers puppets, at least, will migrate wherever she goes.

Contents

FALL/WINTER 2024

People

"I really feel like it was education that allowed me to be where I am today."

FARAH MALLAH, PH.D. STUDENT

B

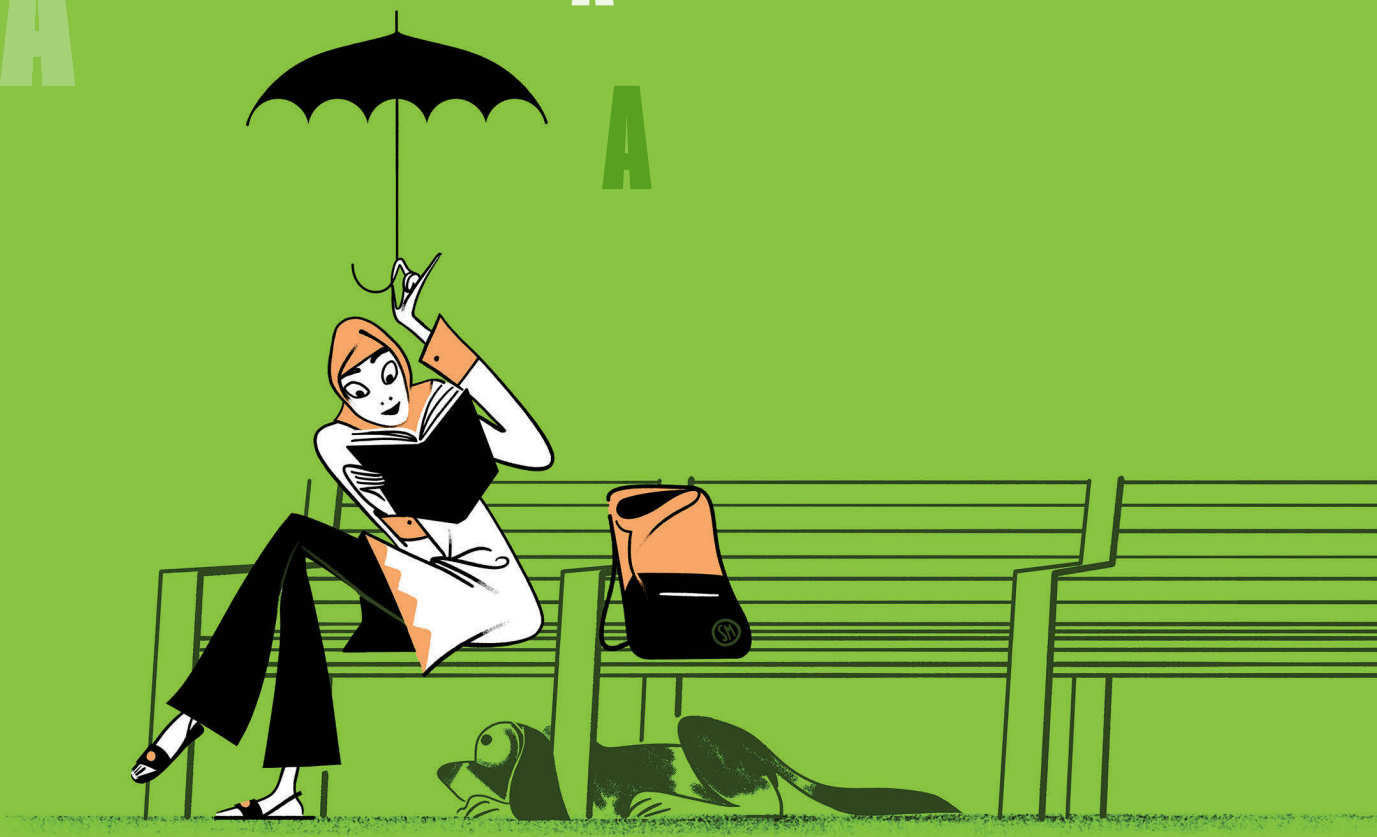
Ideas

C

Practice

PHOTOGRAPH BY **SOPHIE FABBRI**

People



**“It’s not such a complicated thing to do.
But people really want to go on fighting about this.”**

PROFESSOR CATHERINE SNOW (SEE P. 4)

ILLUSTRATION BY **SIMONE MASSONI**

SNOW

DAYS

After 45 years on Appian Way, Catherine Snow is ready to start a new chapter

Story by
Lory Hough

Photographs by
Brad Trent

Celebrating receiving tenure, with Carol Gilligan, Howard Gardner, and Jerry Murphy, 1987

MARTHA STEWART (ABOVE); TOM KATES (BELOW)

B

By the time she was seven years old, Professor Catherine Snow, a pioneering researcher in the language and literacy field, had learned her first lesson about reading: It's not easy for everyone.

Snow herself had always been a good reader, cracking the code with the help of her English teacher mother before she even started elementary school in Toledo, Ohio. As a second grader, Snow was even teaching other kids how to read.

"I was the person who was always asked to sit with the poor readers and help them read, help them practice reading," she says. "It was kind of a useful early exposure to how hard reading could be for some people."

It's a lesson that Snow has carried with her throughout her long career, even though a career in the reading world wasn't exactly what she had in mind when she started at Oberlin College at the age of 16 as a psychology undergraduate. She says she chose that major, in part, because she would "never be a big success in hard science areas" like physics or math. (She jokes that skipping third grade back in Toledo and missing out on learning long division started that downfall.) At Oberlin, she enjoyed languages and literature, but didn't see those as supporting long-term career possibilities. "The social sciences were kind of a default rather than a burning choice," she says, although she admits that she fully supports the American liberal arts tradition, where "you have a few years to explore and think about things, as long as you don't need desperately to earn money the minute you get out."

The minute she got out, graduating from Oberlin in 1966, Snow went to McGill for her master's, where she wrote her thesis on conjunctive (both/and) and disjunctive (either/or) thinking in children. She stayed at McGill for her Ph.D., this time focusing on language acquisition and mothers' speech to children. It's also where she met her husband, Michael Baum. Baum wanted to go to the Netherlands for a postdoc fellowship "and I was totally happy to go, too," Snow says. They planned on staying a year. A year turned into two, which turned into eight after Snow got a job teaching at the Institute for General Linguistics at the University of Amsterdam. As she jumped deeper into linguistics research, she also started to focus on language acquisition for second-language learners.

1940s

1945
Catherine Snow is born in Toledo, Ohio

By the time she moved back to the states and joined the faculty at the Ed School in 1978, Snow was still focusing on language acquisition, especially related to parent-child interactions, but that's when her focus started to shift a bit.

"The students at the Ed School were not as interested in kids as young as two, which is the main target of that sort of research, and so they kind of dragged me into thinking about somewhat older kids," Snow says. "But I was still very much not in any sense a literacy researcher."

Geography also played a role. When she first got to Appian Way, she was squatting temporarily in the office of Professor Courtney Cazden, a reading expert who had contributed to *Sesame Street's* literacy curriculum and was on sabbatical. (Snow would also put her stamp on *Sesame*, helping the show integrate Spanish and multiculturalism into the program.) The office was next door to Professor Jeanne Chall's in Larsen. Chall was an iconic researcher whose 1967 book, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, was considered a landmark in the literacy world. She was also "a formidable, feisty human being," Snow remembers, and one of the initial reasons Snow had no intention of wading into the fiery reading wars that were raging across the education landscape — the same wars happening now over the "right" way to teach reading, the same wars that Snow says have happened "every 20 years since the founding of the Republic."

But back then in Larsen, Snow remembers that "Jeanne was on the phone regularly, yelling and screaming at people. And I thought to myself, oh my God, this reading business, this is a horrible field. People in this field are always engaged in aggression and conflict and it really is not something I ever want to do."

And at first, she didn't, instead applying for grants from places like the Spencer Foundation to study the social psychology of language and from the Milton Fund to look at Spanish grammar acquisition. She became the editor of *Applied Psycholinguistics* (for nearly two decades) and wrote books like *Unfulfilled Expectations: Home and School Influences on Literacy*. She authored dozens of articles on topics ranging from bilingualism to parents as language teachers to English speakers' acquisition of Dutch syntax.

And then in the mid-1990s, Snow's focus started to shift, in part because of **TOM HEHIR, ED.D.'90**, who would, a few years later, become one of Snow's faculty colleagues at the Ed School. At the time, Hehir was an undersecretary for special education in the Clinton Administration and had identified poor reading as the major determinant of classifying students as special needs and in need of special education.

"He thought, well, we really ought to think about how to prevent the emergence of reading difficulties, some of which might of course be related to special needs, but some of which might be related to poor instruction or poor content," Snow says.

In 1995, Hehir got his office to help fund a literacy study through the National Research Council. "I don't know if you know how the National Research Council operated, but when somebody in government decides that it needs advice about something," Snow says, "they put together a study committee, and attempt to make that committee as neutral and balanced as possible, especially when it's a situation that requires delicacy, as the reading wars definitely did at that time."

The committee included what Snow calls "some heavy phonics people" (a method of teaching reading that matches sounds with letters) and those who favored a "whole-language approach" (which prioritizes making meaning from words and sentences). When they went looking for a committee chair, they needed someone who hadn't yet taken a side and hadn't published anything on the topic of how "best" to teach reading.

Snow remembers that "every single legitimate reading researcher was already committed to one side or the other." But she had been focusing her research more on reading development, not specifically on reading instruction, and so she fit the bill. "I was kind of ideologically pure."

For the next three years, Snow and the committee met, and then in 1998, they published a report called *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, which made the case that the majority of reading problems faced by adolescents and adults could have been avoided or resolved in the early years of childhood. The report also "rejected the simplistic dualism between phonics

Snow Dates

The life and times of Catherine Snow

1960s

1966
Graduates from Oberlin with a degree in psychology. Her thesis is on the effects of luminance and contrast on contour dependent color aftereffects

1967
Earns a master's from the Department of Psychology at McGill University, Montreal, Quebec

1969
Co-publishes her first journal article, "Conjunctive and disjunctive thinking in children," in the *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*

Snow co-wrote a preschool literacy curriculum for Scholastic featuring three puppets: Reggie the rhyming rhino, Leo the letter-loving lobster, and Nina the naming newt (not pictured), 2001

JOSHUA LEVINE

and whole language and raised new questions for fruitful inquiry and research," wrote Professor James Kim in a chapter on the reading wars published in *When Research Matters*, a 2008 Harvard Education Press book edited by **FREDERICK HESS, ED.M.'90**.

Snow says chairing that committee taught her a lot, not just about reading instruction, but also about how the reading wars were, for lack of a better word, mislabeled.

"I learned a huge amount about the research and the personalities in this field and the degree to which adherence of the different points of view — although they thought they were in opposition to one another — actually agreed on about 90% of what they believed but exacerbated the 10% where they differed into major conflicts. Really, I thought extremely counterproductive conflicts," she says. "This is sort of like what happens to political discussions today."

The report was, by government and education research standards, a blockbuster, with a wide distribution. State education commissioners across the country even asked their superintendents to provide copies for every elementary school principal.

For Snow, however, the blockbuster report, and the research behind it, was only a first step, she says. On the day that *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* came out, she was in Washington, D.C., where she took part in a press conference and briefings to members of Congress. It's also where she dashed off a quick one-page memo that stated that while the report focused on preventing reading difficulties up to grade three, that wasn't enough.

"If we have 100% success in preventing reading difficulties up to grade three, we will not be generating success in the American education system," she wrote in the memo. "There's a huge amount to learn about language and literacy beyond grade three, and we ought to start to think about that right now."

That memo became the basis for Snow's next report, *Reading for Understanding*, which went beyond thinking that young readers needed simply to read words accurately and fluently. Comprehension was also critical.

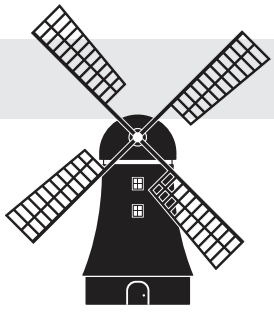
Overall, it was these reports, and the research done to create them, Snow says, that "kind of got me involved in and interested in mechanisms for improving vocabulary, for improving academic language, for improving the use of language in writing and in critical thinking. And that's the work I've been doing for the last 20 years or so."

At Work

Along the way, Snow has been involved in many other influential research projects and studies in the field of language and literacy development that have impacted thousands and thousands of districts, schools, and students around the world. In fact, says Professor **MEREDITH ROWE, ED.M.'99, ED.D.'03**, "pretty much every five years or so she's made a substantial theoretical or practical contribution to the field. And the unique thing about Catherine is that she's contributed to so many different areas and across different historical moments."

Rowe cites a long list of papers and projects, including what she calls "one of my favorites,"

1970s



1970
Moves to the Netherlands, becomes a research assistant at Erasmus University, Rotterdam

1971
Earns a Ph.D. from McGill's Department of Psychology
—
Spends a year on the faculty of the University of Amsterdam

1972
Co-publishes her first book, *Psycholinguistiek* (*Psycholinguistics*) in Amsterdam

1975
Spends a year as a visiting scientist in the Unit for Research on the Medical Applications of Psychology, University of Cambridge. A year later, her son is born

1978
Joins Harvard as a visiting associate professor at HGSE. It becomes official in 1980

"Pretty much every five years or so she's made a substantial theoretical or practical contribution to the field."

PROFESSOR MEREDITH ROWE, ED.M.'99, ED.D.'03

a piece Snow authored on the role of schooling in children's ability to provide formal word definitions. She also mentions Snow's work with Boston Public Schools, where she developed the Word Generation curricula in 2009 to help students debate and use diverse vocabulary in classrooms. But Rowe, who had Snow as a doctoral adviser when she was a student at the Ed School, says Snow's influence on the field goes beyond just projects and papers.

"It's her larger perspective on the field, on the work, and her approach to the job that I admire and have learned the most from," she says. Calling Snow a "selfless team player," Rowe says "Catherine is infinitely curious about children's language and literacy learning and about how to best promote it, with a focus on children's social interactions with parents, teachers, and peers. She has addressed this issue from so many angles and always seems to be one step ahead of the field. She is always pushing people to articulate why their work is important and what it adds. She is supportive yet also critical in the most helpful ways. And she has an uncanny ability to synthesize information extremely efficiently and identify gaps or strengths."

This uncanny ability is something that **PATRICK PROCTOR, ED.D.'05**, a professor at Boston College, says he greatly appreciated when Snow was his doctoral adviser.

"When I was writing my dissertation, I'd send her a draft of something, and she would turn it around in a day or two max," he says. "Now that I'm on this end of it, as a professor, I think, oh my God, how did she do that? And the feedback was always just incredible. It would never be extensive, but it would be perfectly placed and big-enough picture that it gave you freedom and guided you at the same time."

That efficiency also worked well for **YOUNG-SUK GRACE KIM, ED.D.'07**, an education professor at the University of California, Irvine. Kim describes her first impression of Snow as a "commanding presence," someone who "cut straight to the point without any unnecessary detours."

This straightforward communication style didn't work for all students, of course. As Snow wrote in an online tribute piece about Professor Bob Selman when he retired in 2021, "I want to thank him for all the times over the years in which he was there in his office on the sixth floor so I could send students who burst into tears in my office on the third floor up to him because he knew how to deal with weakened students much better than I did."

For Kim, in time, "Catherine became a guiding and stabilizing figure as a doctoral adviser, quite akin to the father figure in my cultural context," she says. "Growing up in Korea, the father often embodied stability and direction within the household." This extended to her research, too. "Despite my dissertation work focusing on phonological awareness, which was not her primary area of expertise, Catherine's extensive work on language development had a significant influence on my research."

Snow's research was also why Patrick Proctor initially decided to come to the Ed School. His father, a superintendent in Connecticut, sent him an op-ed that Snow had written in 1997 for *The Boston Globe* on the rationale for bilingual education instruction for teaching native language. "I read it, and I was like, oh, I think I have to go study with her," he says.

After she became his adviser, "she was very hands off, which for me was perfect," he says. "I had a kid and a family life. She clearly trusted me to do the work that needed to be done. I think her perspective was until I have a reason not to trust him, then I trust him. It was a sort of extrinsic motivator for me. Like, all right, she trusts me. I better do a good job."

Professor **PAOLA UCCELLI, ED.D.'03**, felt the same trust when Snow was her adviser. (And adds that she has never seen Snow stressed out, "Not even once!")

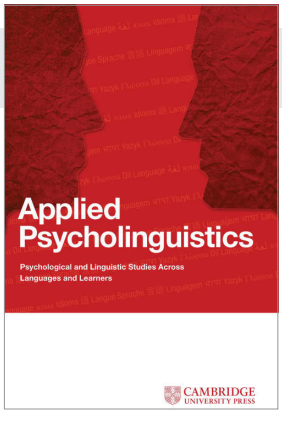
"Working with Catherine has always meant having exceptional freedom for my ideas and projects while getting the most insightful and immediate feedback from her," she says. Part of that could be in the way Snow approaches her own work, Uccelli says. "Big ideas and big problems, more than what she considers irrelevant details, occupy her mind and illuminate the world of educational research and practice."

MARIELA PAEZ, ED.M.'96, ED.D.'01, an associate professor of education at Boston College, says she appreciates that Snow's mentorship doesn't end when you graduate from the Ed School.

1980s

1983
Co-founds the Child Language Data Exchange System, a central repository of transcripts and media data collected from conversations with children

1984
Becomes editor of *Applied Psycholinguistics* (until 2002), with John Locke



1987
Receives tenure, becomes full professor

1990s

1990
Serves as HGSE's academic dean

1991
Fills in as acting dean for a year after Patricia Graham, the school's first female dean, steps down


"Every single legitimate reading researcher was already committed to one side or the other...

...I was kind of ideologically pure."

CATHERINE SNOW

PHOTO CREDIT

Sharing her love of reading, 2001

TONY RINALDO

"Everybody knows about the scholarly prowess of Dr. Snow, but what people may not realize is that she shows the same dedication to mentoring and developing new scholars in the field," she says. "When I first started as an assistant professor at Boston College, I was overwhelmed with the responsibilities of my position. I contacted her, and we met one afternoon at one of her favorite Indian restaurants in Brookline to discuss my new role. We discussed everything from attending faculty meetings to keeping my research program going, and she had excellent advice for how to approach academia and grow in the areas of research, teaching, and service to make tenure as a professor. She has been a source of inspiration and continues to champion my success in academia." This includes serving on advisory board panels for Paez's projects, citing Paez's work in her own research, and inviting Paez to present in her classes.

At Home

Perhaps one of the people Snow has influenced the most career-wise is her son, Nathaniel Baum-Snow, an economics professor at the University of Toronto. "He took a path in between neuroscience, which is what his father does, and human psychology, which is what I do," says Snow.

Says Baum-Snow, "Growing up, she constantly challenged me to think hard and analytically about topics of broad importance. This is something I enjoy doing and aspire to continue with throughout my life. The paradigm put forth by the field of economics is the most intellectually rewarding avenue I found to continue to improve my understanding of the world and perhaps help it to function just a little bit better. Observing my mom also gave me some tacit knowledge and intuition that has helped me greatly in navigating the world of academia." For example, he says, "I learned that it is impossible to do this job well without immersing yourself in it. Being an academic is not a 9-to-5 job, but instead it is a way of life."

Baum-Snow saw this firsthand, at an early age. "When I was a child, Mom was always surrounded by her work. Before computers were widespread, she would always bring home big stacks of papers to read. These were drafts of qualifying proposals and dissertation chapters written by her students. Once she got a laptop, it was always out in the kitchen as she was both making dinner and getting caught up on work at the same time. She was ahead of her time in these ways, as this integration of work with life has become much more widespread in recent years across so many professions."

That integration with life also taught Baum-Snow about the larger world.

"She would throw big parties at our house for her students, usually once or twice a year, and make a point of inviting some students and/or visiting researchers from abroad every year at Thanksgiving," he says. "Every year we had a few people from around the world eating with us and around the house. I learned so much from these experiences about how people from different backgrounds approach life differently."

When told that her son, in an article for Arizona State University, had also described her as a serious person, "with seriousness either in her genes or her upbringing or both," Snow seems intrigued — and perplexed.

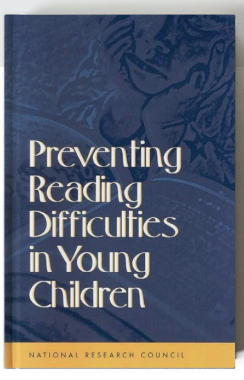
"I think almost everything you could say about somebody is probably genes and upbringing, but the real question is, what's the alternative to serious?" she says. "If you mean serious in the sense of not focused on trivialities, I guess I would agree. I don't have a lot of tolerance for small talk. For example, I never get my hair done. I can't stand the conversations one needs to engage in for that.

"But if you mean serious as not funny, I would be deeply offended because I actually think I'm often quite funny," she says. "I do think the only

1990s

1995
Chairs the National Research Council Committee on Prevention of Reading Difficulties

1998
Publishes *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*



1999
Becomes president of the American Educational Research Association

2000s

2003
Gets an honorary degree from the University of Nijmegen

—

Five years later (2008), receives honorary degree from the University of Oslo

2004
Wins student-nominated Morningstar Family Teaching Award at HGSE

—

Publishes *Reading Next* with the Carnegie Corporation of New York

"I do think the only real pedagogical skill I have is to use humor as a way of looking at the other side of things."

PROFESSOR CATHERINE SNOW

real pedagogical skill I have is to use humor as a way of looking at the other side of things. Pushing people to be too serious means taking things on faith, and I don't think we should be encouraging our students to take things on faith. We should be encouraging them to turn things around and upside down and see what the alternatives are. But let's assume he meant serious in the sense of not focused on trivialities."

Snow may not tolerate the social act of getting her hair done, but no story about her would be complete without mentioning her well-known flair for fashion.

"Catherine is renowned for her distinctive and stylish fashion sense, often donning fedora hats and short skirts paired with stockings featuring interesting and unique patterns," says Grace Kim. "She is the only female who looks so awesome in fedora hats. In fact, over the two decades that I have known her, I can distinctly recall seeing her wear a pair of pants only once!" During a centennial celebration on campus in 2020, Grace Kim remembers honoring Snow's fashion sense. "Several of us decided to join in the fun by wearing skirts with unique stockings ourselves," she says. "It's a cherished memory that vividly captures the camaraderie and playful spirit Catherine inspired among us."

After 45 years at the Ed School, Snow is getting ready to retire from teaching at the end of this academic year. She'll stay on as an emeritus research professor, and move from her big office in Larsen to a smaller space on campus. "It's so despressing to look around and think, what am I going to do with all of this sh**?" she says. For now, though, Snow has become a self-described utility outfielder for the Literacy and Languages concentration, which she co-chairs. Last year, when Uccelli was on sabbatical, she taught her module. This spring, when Rowe goes on sabbatical, Snow will teach her course on child language. Ironically, she points out, this was originally her course, before Rowe adopted it. "It's still the topics and the focus of the course that I used to teach 20 years ago," Snow says, "so it's kind of coming full circle."

These days, she's also circling back to the reading wars, which flared up again just after the pandemic, especially with the release of a podcast series on American Public Media that raised alarms about a literacy crisis. (Snow says she didn't have enough blood pressure medication to listen to the whole series.) She's surprised by the degree to which people are willing to invoke a literacy crisis, she says, when national reading scores have slowly grown. And while students do need phonics instruction — one of the concerns raised by the series and others who worry schools aren't doing it enough — Snow says students don't need hours and hours of phonics work every day. It needs to be a balance with whole-language work, she says.

And that balance is doable — and we *can* teach students to read. As she said in a recent *Harvard Magazine* interview, "It's not such a complicated thing to do. But people really want to go on fighting about this." □

Speaking to students at Welcome Day, 2023

JILL ANDERSON

2005
In collaboration with Boston Public Schools and the Strategic Education Research Partnership, creates the Word Generation curriculum for middle school classrooms

2025
Retires after 45 years at HGSE

Can Research Actually Be Practical, Not Just Publishable?

One alum shows that the answer is yes

Story by **Lory Hough**

When **TARA NICOLA, ED.M.'20, PH.D.'23**, begins her research, she intentionally keeps something important in mind: The work will be most useful if it gets into the hands of those who really need it.

"I'm driven by research questions that are rooted in actual problems of practice that need to be solved by practitioners," she says. "A big goal of mine is to produce findings that actually get back to practitioners. People often don't have access to research or to journal articles."

It's a goal that Nicola is already meeting. In the past, her research has included helping schools build counseling programs that are not just bigger, but better for student needs. She also analyzed high school recommendation letters and came up with ways for schools to revamp what's written to make the letters more equitable for college-bound students.

Nicola's latest research tackles how to better support school counselors in producing school profiles — an often overlooked but important document that students include with their college applications and admissions officers use to evaluate students who apply.

"Research on school profiles in a journal is meaningless," she says, "if the people who actually create the profiles and interact with them can't read the research."

One way that she's getting the work out there, especially to school counselors across the country, is by partnering with Making Caring Common (MCC) and their new School Profile Project.

"When I first saw Dr. Nicola's research on school profiles, I knew I wanted to collaborate right away," says Trisha Ross Anderson, MCC's college admissions program director. "Not only was the work critical to improving holistic review and equity in admissions, but her research was practical and immediately actionable. Almost all of Dr. Nicola's research-based suggestions of factors to include in the profile were things that counselors could include if they knew that these factors greatly mattered to admission decisions."

Based on Nicola's work, MCC is offering free online editable templates, advice from counselors on approaching challenges, specifics on what should be included, and sample school profiles. In September, MCC offered two profile webinars for school counselors.

Nicola first learned about the need for schools to rethink their school profiles when she was part of the research team at the National Association for College Admission Counseling, just before she started as a student at the Ed School a few years ago.

"We collected profiles from all different high schools across the country," she says. "That was my first foray into looking at profiles and I was just shocked at the disparities across them. You'll have profiles that are five or six pages long, professionally designed, beautiful works of art. And then I had one from a school that was barely a page with Microsoft clip art. I didn't even know that clip art was still in existence. It was shocking that both of these were being submitted to colleges." Unfortunately, she realized, "no one was really paying much attention to school profiles beyond

"I'm driven by research questions that are rooted in actual problems of practice that need to be solved by practitioners."
TARA NICOLA

Tara Nicola

PHOTOGRAPH BY **WINKY LEWIS**

ISTOCK

the admissions folks who were reading them on a daily basis."

Part of the problem is that high school counselors don't have access to all the data they need to write stronger profiles, or they don't have the time or bandwidth. But Nicola says high schools need to realize that their school profile is important because it provides colleges with critical behind-the-scenes information.

"The school profile helps colleges understand the context behind a student's grades, to be able to better interpret the transcript, and also just other portions of the student's application," she says.

A basic profile usually includes a description of coursework offered and student demographics, like school size. Most are missing the more in-depth information that can put a student's experience and environment into context. For example, a deeper profile might explain that the school doesn't have money to fund afterschool clubs, which could explain why a student applicant isn't listing extracurricular activities. Noting that a high school is in a remote rural area "can be helpful to the admissions reader to know that the school actually is isolated from potential opportunities for the student," Nicola says. Explanations around course limitations or rules set by district policies also help with context. "Your school can have 20 AP courses, but if you limit students to only taking four APs, then your students can really only take four," she says.

Of course, she says, school profiles don't need to be super long.

"I have talked with a lot of admissions folks over the years and from my conversations with them, including as part of the study, they didn't necessarily want a five- or six-pager," she says. "They're normally going into these documents to look for very specific pieces of information. They want to be able to find it quickly."

Thinking about her work moving forward, Nicola says she plans on continuing to put out research that is publishable *and* practical, especially with her new job as a senior data scientist with the nonprofit Common App organization.

"The Common App has been building out its research team over the past year and is really interested in expanding the amount of public-facing work that we're able to share," she says. "We have all the data from many years that students submit, that counselors submit, and that teachers submit."

The goal is to make more of that data digestible, and not just to the guidance counselors and college enrollment managers who typically work with the organization, but also to students, parents, and others who visit the Common App website and want to learn about the admissions process.

Does she ever imagine turning all of her usable research into a usable book?

"A book is a possibility for the future," she says. "There's just so much appetite for this sort of usable information that additional work is necessary, but I think it would be very appreciated within the field." □

"The school profile helps colleges understand the context behind a student's grades, to be able to better interpret the transcript, and also just other portions of the student's application."
TARA NICOLA

Music Maker

Plus a Fulbright, *Annie*, and a promised dog

Story by **Lory Hough**

During the summer of 2022, while still a student at the New England Conservatory, **ZION DYSON, ED.M.'24**, piloted a music program for children living in Prey Touch Commune, a rural community in Cambodia. It was such a great experience that she made it a goal to one day return and expand the program. This academic year, thanks to winning a Fulbright scholarship (one of three from the Ed School), that's exactly what Dyson is doing.

You started thinking about the Fulbright while you were at the Ed School, correct?
I considered applying as either an English teaching assistant or student researcher. Through HGSE Fulbright panels, I learned that the research/study award would give me the freedom and support to continue working on my project. However, as the application deadline grew closer, I became unsure about applying. My HGSE graduation would mark my first time in "the real world," my first time out of school, and I wasn't sure if I should prioritize the Fulbright over beginning my career in the United States. I brought this up at my first meeting with Tricia, my Student-Alumni Mentoring Initiative (SAMI) mentor, and she enthusiastically encouraged me to apply.

Tell us about the original music program that you created.
I worked with a colleague to pilot music integration into an English language program for three weeks. The program serves around 400 students in grades 3–12. Students in this community do not have access to music education in school or extracurricular programs, and we wanted to address this need through music integration. We taught nursery rhymes and rhythm games to students to improve their awareness of prosody, the patterns of stress and intonation in language. We also taught music lessons to the English language teachers so they could use music in their classes.

How are you expanding this work with the Fulbright?
While the pilot was successful, we realized that our goal of creating a self-sustaining music integration program was more challenging than we once thought. One teacher, Vichet, now frequently includes music in his classes, and he says it makes learning much more enjoyable for his students. However, the other teachers require additional professional development to become comfortable implementing music. We also noticed additional problems of practice that could not be addressed through music integration: reliance on rote learning, limited opportunities for students to practice conversational English, and the need for culturally relevant teaching materials. With this Fulbright … we will study student and teacher experience in the program and consider methods of change. We will also learn about Cambodian music and arts practices and consider ways to integrate culturally sustaining arts into the English language program.

Stepping back, what made you decide to apply to HGSE after graduating from the conservatory?
I studied jazz vocal performance with a music-in-education concentration. The head of the program was current HGSE Ph.D. student **JOSH GILBERT, ED.M.'17,** an NEC and HGSE alum. His courses were life changing. I learned about music integration, when music is taught alongside other subjects to increase student engagement and understanding. Thinking back to the meaningful music-integrated experiences in high school and college, I wondered how I could make music integration a central part of my career. Josh recommended I pursue a master's degree in education. I researched graduate programs and found that HGSE would give me the freedom I needed to explore this and other topics through its Human Development and Education Program with an Arts and Learning Concentration. Seeing Josh as a role model gave me the confidence to apply, and I'm so glad I did!

You've been performing for a long time.
I have been a performer since kindergarten. My elementary school had an incredible music and arts program. Every year, each grade performed an original musical, with a script and songs written by the music teacher. In second grade, I joined the glee club, where I sang my first solo, surprising my family with "Great Green Globs of Greasy Grimy Gopher Guts." Then, in fifth grade, my parents encouraged me to audition for a local junior theatre production of *Annie*. I only agreed when they promised to get me a puppy if I was cast as the titular role. They were just as shocked as I was when we found out I would be playing Annie. This show changed my life, and I have been a performer (and dog owner) ever since. □

Zion Dyson

COURTESY ZION DYSON

Farah Mallah

'Economic Connectedness' and Classroom Interactions

Could more AP courses help with cross-income interactions?

Story by **Lory Hough**

Back in 2022, Harvard professor Raj Chetty released a new report about the deep connection between friendship and economic mobility. Drawing on a massive dataset of more than 72 million social media users, Chetty found that people tend to befriend others with similar incomes. Chetty also found that when low-income children grow up in communities with what he calls "economic connectedness," meaning they have connections with people from *other* socio-economic groups, they are much more likely to rise out of poverty.

When Ph.D. student Farah Mallah learned about Chetty's work, she knew it would help her own research on income and education.

"I read his work, and it made me think about the role of schools in helping or hindering cross-class interactions," she says. "I wanted to understand what school policies impact cross-income interactions from forming." As she writes in a related paper that she's working on, "The strong relationship between cross-income friendships and long-term outcomes leads to the question: Can we do anything about it? How schools are organized could make it easier or harder for friendships to form between lower- and upper-income students."

Mallah started looking into one area where students interact (or don't) in schools: the classroom. In particular, she looked at what impact adding an AP class would have on cross-income interactions.

Using data from Texas state administrators that spanned from 2004 to 2022, and with a dissertation grant from the Russell Sage Foundation, Mallah was able to look at the exact classes that students in grades 5 to 12 were taking. She found that the likelihood that lower-income students were exposed to upper-income students was low. On average, she writes, "the typical (median) lower-income student goes through grades 5 to 12 having one-tenth the share of upper-income classmates as their upper-income counterparts, and one in every five lower-income students has a share of upper-income classmates smaller than 1%."

This lack of exposure that lower- and higher-income students have to one another — the economic connectedness that Chetty noted — makes it difficult for students to form cross-income friendships.

But Mallah found that adding an AP class in a school helps increase that exposure, although it varies by subject. With math, where enrollment in an AP course often depends on prior preparation, "lower-income students may be less likely to benefit from the addition of an AP course," she says. "The increase in the exposure to higher-income students is mainly driven by three subject areas: science, foreign language, and fine arts."

She also found that analyzing students is difficult because so many things can affect outcomes. For example, a great biology teacher might join a school and add a new AP course.

"Then the question is, are lower-income students taking science courses and exposed to higher-income students because of the great biology teacher or because now there *is* an AP course offered?"

Reflecting on the equity work she is doing, Mallah says her interest goes beyond just simply the research. It's also personal.

"I didn't grow up in the United States. I moved around a lot, across the Middle East," she says. "I'm originally Jordanian with Palestinian heritage, and have lived in Saudia Arabia, Bahrain, Dubai. My parents spent more than their savings to get us through private schools. I ended up getting a merit scholarship to Georgetown in Qatar," where she majored in international economics and joined an organization that taught English to immigrant campus workers. Unfortunately, she says many of her peers growing up were not as lucky with their schooling options, which has fed her passion for equity in education.

"I really think it was education that allowed me to be where I am today," she says, and helping others access similar paths has become a life philosophy. "If you're blessed with something, the least you can do is help your community, as cheesy as that might sound. These interactions" — studying low-income students and helping immigrants —"have shaped the way I think about economic mobility and have broadened my horizons."

Mallah hopes to continue this work beyond just one paper. She also wants to find ways to get her work out to those who would benefit the most.

"A goal of mine is to be able to uncover what we don't know and share those findings broadly," she says. "And, of course, speak to more than other academics about the work." □

"The strong relationship between cross-income friendships and long-term outcomes leads to the question: Can we do anything about it?"

FARAH MALLAH

PHOTOGRAPH BY **SOPHIE FABBRI**

Heavy Metal Harvard

From *The Boneyard* to Harvard Yard

Story by **Lory Hough**

Lecturer Candice Crawford-Zakian remembers writing her first song. She was in elementary school and scribbled lyrics in the back of *How Things Work*, a book she had in her bedroom in Washington, D.C.

"It was an acapella, Sweet Honey in the Rock-type of song," she says, referring to the all-Black female ensemble that started in the early 1970s. "My mother used to love Sweet Honey in the Rock and would listen to them every morning."

When she turned 12, she decided that music would be her future.

"I was a huge Gloria Estefan fan," she says. "I said to my parents, I want to be a songwriter."

She continued to write, adding poetry and essays to the mix, and by the time she got to high school, she considered joining a band.

"I was very much into the alternative rock scene. Pearl Jam, Alice in Chains," she says. "But given that I'm a Black female, and at that time, rock and hip-hop were very racially divided, it was hard for me to find people to play with. I didn't start playing and actively participating in music until probably about 24."

That's when she joined her first "real" band, Red Pill Down, an alternative metal band that toured up and down the East Coast.

"I was singing and screaming," she says. "I'm sure it was interesting to see a short Black young woman with these white guys in the early 2000s." The band eventually "imploded," she says, "as bands often do." She stayed in the music world, though, working as a production assistant for an XM radio station.

"The cool thing about XM was they were really focused on crafting a whole sonic experience with each channel as opposed to traditional radio," she says, meaning channels covered full artist catalogs. "On *The Boneyard,* the show I worked on, one of the classic artists would be Ozzy Osborne, but as opposed to only playing the hits that came out of Black Sabbath or Ozzy, we would go deep into the whole album collection. When you're listening, you feel like you're having more of an immersive experience. Today, if you listen to the same channel for more than 30 minutes, you're going to hear the same song again."

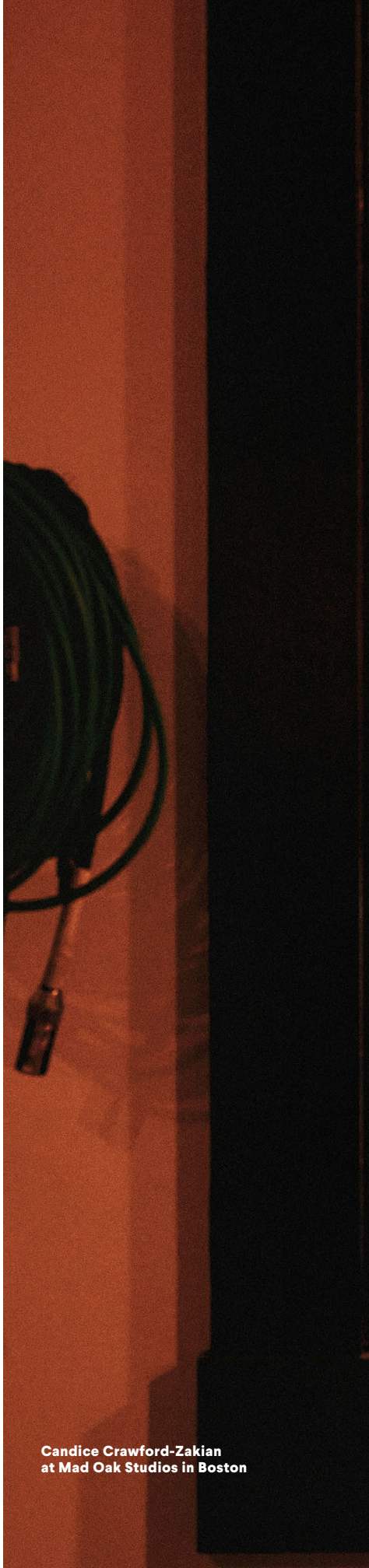
Eventually, Crawford-Zakian joined other bands, ranging from jazz to acoustic pop, and started doing solo work, including an alt-blues album she's currently recording at Mad Oak Studios in Boston, where other musicians like Levon Helm and Aerosmith have recorded. She also shifted gears career-wise after attending a leadership development conference on unconscious group dynamics.

"It blew my mind," she says. She applied to grad school and attended George Washington University, where she learned about psychoanalytic theory and leadership. She ended up teaching at the Ed School, specializing in leadership development and organizational dynamics courses for students in the Ed.L.D. Program.

Crawford-Zakian has shifted gears again, this time at home, with a new baby. Asked if her little one is decked out in band tees, she laughs. "I've been more preoccupied with reliving my own childhood," she says. "I put her in a Cabbage Patch Kids onesie, instead." □

"I was singing and screaming."

CANDICE CRAWFORD-ZAKIAN



Candice Crawford-Zakian at Mad Oak Studios in Boston

PHOTOGRAPH BY **SIMON SIMARD**

Ideas

“I loved reading Sandra Boynton’s *Moo, Baa, La La La!* to my son. It was the first book to make him giggle uncontrollably.”

LECTURER DAVID DOCKTERMAN (SEE P. 32)

ILLUSTRATION BY **SIMONE MASSONI**

F R

P E O

What does it take to make a successful education podcast? Mix two educators, a weekly dose of wisdom, and a clever chicken-related name and see what happens

Story by **Grace Tatter, Ed.M.'18**
Illustrations by **Hélène Builly**


E E
P L E

The name of Professor Jal Mehta (above left) and Rod Allen's (right) podcast originated two decades before they would meet,

and about a decade before podcasting as a medium even existed.

In a series of speeches given across much of the English-speaking world throughout the 1990s, John Abbott, founder of the 21st Century Learning Initiative, posed a question: "Do we want our children to grow up as battery hens, or free range chickens?"

Battery hens are egg-laying chickens that for their whole lives are confined to cages on factory farms. Abbott posited that they are cheaper for a farmer to raise than their free-range counterparts. Battery hens are often overfed, and their cramped-caged existence renders them nearly incapable of flight, or even standing. They have no defense against predators or adverse circumstances should they escape or should anything unexpected compromise their habitat. Free-range chickens, however, are adaptable. If the unpredictable happens, they are more likely to survive. More than that, Abbott believed, they are more likely to *thrive*.

Abbott's point — that schools should prepare students to adapt to circumstances we cannot even imagine — heavily informed Allen's work as British Columbia's superintendent of learning, as he shepherded through a province-wide overhaul of curriculum, a multi-year process that required a substantive shift in culture and priorities from the Ministry of Education to individual classrooms.

This free-range concept also dovetailed nicely with Mehta's research on deeper learning, which describes the skills and knowledge required for students to thrive both individually and as citizens. So, when Allen and Mehta were deciding what to name their podcast, which would delve into similar ideas about learning and education, Allen make a suggestion: *Free Range Chickens*.

"Jal wisely said, 'Well, people might get the wrong idea because … don't we eventually kill and eat the chickens?'" Allen recalls of the conversation. They went instead with *Free Range Humans*.

Meeting of Minds

Nearly four years later, Allen and Mehta have produced 66 episodes and counting, with plans for many more episodes to come. But that the two educators would host a podcast together — or even meet — was not inevitable. Most of Mehta's research has focused on Amer-

TIM LLEWELLYN; COURTESY ROD ALLEN

"You guys are to me the new Tom and Ray [of *Car Talk*], which is the highest praise I could offer anybody."

RON BERGER, ED.M.'90

ican schools, and Allen had spent his entire career in British Columbia. Allen had never even visited Appian Way until a Global Education Innovation Initiative conference in 2017, in which policymakers, educators, and researchers from all over the world gathered at the Ed School to share ideas and lessons learned about 21st-century education. By then, Allen had left the Ministry of Education to serve as a district superintendent, a role he'd held for decades before his government post.

Mehta remembers being instantly impressed by Allen's presentation, in which he discussed how his district employed indigenous elders as paraprofessionals, expanding the definition in his community of what it means to be an educator in public schools and made indigenous knowledge an important part of learning and teaching.

"His presentation was in color, and everybody else's was in black and white, and I was like, 'I want to work with that guy,'" Mehta remembers thinking.

One of Mehta's students, **AMELIA PETERSON, ED.M.'12, PH.D.'20**, had anticipated this intellectual match between her professor and Allen while she was researching British Columbia's curriculum reform. While Allen was in Cambridge, she arranged a one-on-one introduction. The two met in Mehta's office, and from there, a steady collaborative relationship was born. In 2018, Allen helped bring other Canadian districts to the Deeper Learning Dozen, a community of practice for districts committed to making deeper learning opportunities more

LOOKING FOR A NEW POD? JUMP IN WITH THESE FOUR EPISODES

Interested in listening to *Free Range Humans* but don't know where to start? You could start at the beginning with the first episode (June 10, 2021), when Jal Mehta and Rod Allen sat down with Denise Augustine, director of Aboriginal education and learner engagement at School District 79 Cowichan, in Duncan, British Columbia, Canada. The trio talked about family life during the pandemic, equity in education, and the importance of "knowledge keepers." If you'd rather jump around the list of past episodes, here are a few suggestions from the hosts on good places to start.

Generative AI in Schools: Adopted vs. Arrived

***JUSTIN REICH, ED.D.'12**, associate professor of digital media in the department of Comparative Media Studies/Writing at MIT and the director of the Teaching Systems Lab, discussed what it means that generative AI has arrived in the education space.*

Heart, Head, Hands

A conversation with Marshall Ganz, a lecturer at the Harvard Kennedy School, who talked about how the education system needs to take a page from the social movement and community organizing playbook when it comes to seeking real change.

Like Mother, Like Son?

A one-on-one conversation with Mehta and his mother, Louise Mehta, a former teacher and school leader, including an exploration of whether Louise is truly a "free range human."

"Just Tell the Damn Truth!"

Jeff Duncan-Andrade, an associate professor at San Francisco State University, talked about how schools should be leveraging the pandemic to reinvent education and how, when it comes to the foundation of schools, we need to stop "ducking, dodging, and denying."

accessible for students and educators alike that Mehta co-founded with **JOHN WATKINS, ED.D.'97**.

But it wasn't until the midst of the pandemic that Allen posed an invitation to Mehta via a comment in Google Docs. "Curious about a podcast?" he wrote.

Mehta, it turns out, *was* curious. The pandemic had caused a podcast boom. Creators didn't have to leave their homes to start podcasts, and listeners were looking for ways to stay engaged with ideas outside of their homes. A podcast also seemed particularly well-suited to two gregarious educators well-practiced at convening wide-ranging conversations.

"I love to teach in dialogue with people; to me, the best part of teaching is that you never know what people are going to say," Mehta says. He was mainlining longform podcasts himself, where the hosts were going in-depth on specific topics, unconstrained by the time limits of news radio. "We like to have those kinds of conversations anyway," Mehta says he remembers thinking. "And so it just seemed like a good meeting point."

They also knew what audience they were hoping to reach, Mehta says: "Someone who is dissatisfied in some way with the way that we currently do education and has some optimism or hope about what we might do instead."

Allen agrees. In his role at the Ministry of Education, he had worked with any group who even touched schools — educators working inside and outside of schools, parents, students, business owners, politicians, and researchers.

> **"We like to have those kinds of conversations anyway. And so it just seemed like a good meeting point."**
>
> **JAL MEHTA**

And he was eager to incorporate their input into the reimagination of how schools in British Columbia could work, essentially to instill a culture of deeper learning. Allen spent a year traveling across the province talking to "everyone and their dog" about how to transform learning. They all wanted students to love learning in the present and be prepared for an ever-changing world in the future, but there was healthy disagreement about the steps needed to realize that goal. Allen was imagining all of these varied stakeholders as he and Mehta began developing their podcast. These potential listeners weren't unilaterally on board with the ethos of deeper learning, "but they felt that they had a stake in us getting education right," Allen says. Their podcast wouldn't just be a vehicle to convert listeners to a specific vision of deeper learning. It would also be a means to listen to people with different ideas, and to collaborate on new ideas, in real time. They had the name, *Free Range Humans*, and the mission: to explore "how we can make schools fit for human consumption."

Now, they just had to figure out how to put it all together.

The Ingredients

Podcasting has a reputation for having a low technical barrier of entry: a mic and Wi-Fi, and you can upload most anything to major podcasting platforms. However, making a podcast that people want to listen to — where the guest's audio is comprehensible and not distractingly noisy; where

LIGHTNING ROUND

Curious what kinds of questions are asked in the popular lightning round at the end of most episodes? Some are serious and related to teaching and learning, while others are just fun, revealing something about the episode's guest. Here are a few recent examples.

- **What's something important that you learned working with other countries' education systems?**
- **Name one book, podcast, or movie that is spurring your thinking right now?**
- **What's the number one thing you want schools to get right?**
- **Is there something you're not good at?**
- **What is one way you're a true Texan?**
- **Is there a technology you don't feel totally comfortable using?**
- **What's one thing that lots of people in education think is right that you think is wrong?**
- **I used to think...and now I think...**
- **What field or domain should we be looking at in education for inspiration?**
- **What's one thing you've changed your mind about?**
- **Where's the best beer?**

neither guests nor hosts are too rambley — *that* takes skill, and not only adept hosts, but a producer. Enter **GINO BENIAMINO, ED.M.'09**.

Beniamino collaborated with Mehta while working at the Ed School from 2005 to 2014 as an instructional technologist; they were also teammates on the Ed Sox softball team, where Beniamino played shortstop. After leaving the Ed School, Beniamino started his own media production company. Mehta knew Beniamino could help take *Free Range Humans* from an idea in the margins of a Google Doc to a real podcast that people would return to week after week. Beniamino's time helping Ed School professors navigate technology prepared him to set up guests for a podcast recording, walking them through technical details that ensure they'll sound professional quality, while keeping them at ease before the interview begins. Beniamino then also smooths out the conversation after recording, taking care to snip filler words and any tangents.

"The difference between us having a conversation and having a podcast is Gino," Mehta says. "It wouldn't sound like a podcast if it didn't have Gino's editing and music and so forth."

Together, Allen, Mehta, and Beniamino have decided on their signature format: a conversation with an expert about an education issue, followed by a lightning round. Usually, either Allen or Mehta knows the guest before inviting them on the podcast, while the other one is often introduced to the guest during the recording. The result is a balance of trust that allows for the guest to feel comfortable going deep on challenging topics, and genuine curiosity.

"We really strive in the podcast to be a conversation, not an interview," Allen said. The hosts have gotten less scripted as the show has developed. The result is a dynamic dialogue that makes the listener feel like they're at the table, instead of in the audience of the lecture hall.

Mehta says that years in the classroom have helped cultivate the ability to make space for that kind of conversation.

"I think both Rod and I are pretty comfortable looking for the interesting part of what's coming out," Mehta says, "and if somebody says something that's counterintuitive or compelling, building on that or going with that."

Educators have to do this all of the time, Mehta says. "When you are teaching in an interactive way, you have a set of points or ideas that you're hoping will get hit upon during the time that you have, but you also know that when there's energy around a topic or an idea, you want to let that expand. And if something else has to contract, that's okay."

But the organic sound of the conversations that make for the meat of each episode belies the level of preparation involved.

"My dad is a theater director, and he would have always said things that appear spontaneous are often the results of a lot of pretty careful planning," Mehta says.

Before they get into the virtual recording studio, Mehta and Allen have listened to other interviews

> **"We really strive in the podcast to be a conversation, not an interview."**
>
> **ROD ALLEN**

with their guest and familiarized themselves with the intricacies of the guest's work, so they have the context to go deep. While, for the most part, a good conversation makes for a good podcast, there are some accommodations to make a recorded conversation more accessible and enjoyable for an outside listener. In real life, Allen is wary to interrupt — perhaps, Mehta jokes, a byproduct of his Canadian-ness — and he's learned that longwinded answers, even if impassioned and substantive, don't always make for easy podcast listening.

Just as Beniamino helps prepare guests technically before hitting record, Allen and Mehta prepare them for the rhythm of the conversation. Mehta coaches basketball, and says he draws from that well of skills for the podcast, as well. Conventional podcasting wisdom is that hearing the same person talk for more than a minute can make a multitasking listener zone out. So Mehta tells his guests they don't have to make all their points at once: "Just pass the ball and trust that you'll get it back."

In keeping with Allen's town-hall vision, the nature of their guests' work is varied. Throughout the course of three seasons, they've hosted not only high-level officials and researchers, including many of Mehta's colleagues at the Ed School, but also high school students and teachers. They're creative when thinking about the areas of their lives and networks to plumb for the show. They've even hosted Mehta's mother, Louise Mehta, an experienced educator whose career included stints as a teacher, administrator, and associate of the Park School, an independent school in Baltimore, Maryland, whose commitment to progressive education greatly influenced her son. Mehta says that his favorite guests tend to "wear their expertise lightly," meaning that they're willing to engage with ideas they might not have encountered before. He knew that his mother had that in spades, and that she was unafraid of challenging him, which would make for a rewarding listen, parent or not.

The diversity of their two working worlds makes for an interesting mix of voices, Beniamino said. "They're people that I would have never talked to or interacted with or had a chance to hear from, and they've found a way to bring these networks together in a space that's really productive, I think, for education as a whole."

Just as important as their relationship with their guests is the co-hosts relationship with each other. **RON BERGER, ED.M.'90**, chief academic officer for the nonprofit EL Education, is a superfan of the public radio program *Car Talk*, which won over a dedicated listenership due to the convivial rapport between its hosts, brothers Tom and the late Ray Magliozzi, who were known as Click and Clack.

Berger has been a repeat guest on *Free Range Humans*, as well as a co-host in a second-season episode in which he helped Allen interview Mehta. "You guys are to me the new Tom and Ray, which is the highest praise I could offer anybody," Berger told them during the episode. Just like Click and Clack, Mehta and Allen impart wisdom, but they also crack jokes. Sometimes they impart wisdom *by* cracking jokes. In many ways, their friendship is as central to the show as their educational expertise.

Their dynamic isn't the only way Click and Clack comes through in *Free Range Humans*. Mehta said in his interview with Berger and Allen that he often uses the Magliozzis as a way to explain the concept of deeper learning. People would call into *Car Talk* and ask a simple question about their car, like, "Why is it making this weird sound?" The brothers would ask follow-up questions about when the sound happens, at what speed, or in what weather conditions. The result, Mehta told Berger and Allen, was that "you're witnessing a conversation between someone who has a deep understanding of a system and someone who can only see the symptoms of the system."

Similarly, in every episode of *Free Range Humans*, listeners are exposed to hosts who understand the systems they're talking about, but who are also endlessly refining their ideas and asking new questions. And as they quickly figure out, deeper learning isn't just for children, but for learners of all ages — and makes for especially effective podcast hosts. □

GRACE TATTER, ED.M.'18, is a writer based in New York. Her last piece in *Ed.* was about a documentary focused on teachers trying to make their classrooms more equitable

On My Bookshelf

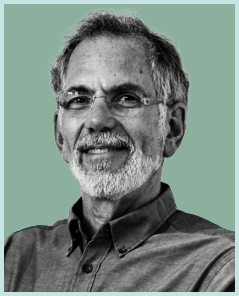
Lecturer David Dockterman, Ed.D.'88

What are you currently reading?

Finding Margaret Fuller: A Novel by Allison Pataki

What drew you to this book?

I've been part of the same book club for more than 15 years and *Finding Margaret Fuller* is our current read. We earlier read a biography of Margaret Fuller, a pioneering American feminist in the first half of the 19th century. This fictionalized version of her story provides a nuanced representation of her personal interactions with all kinds of leading authors, intellectuals, and reformers of the time, much of it taking place in Boston, Cambridge, and Concord. I am enjoying exploring the craft of historical fiction.



Your favorite book as a child?

My early childhood happened a long time ago. I mainly remember sitting in a rocking chair with my mother. I have a much easier time remembering my favorite book as the parent of a young child. I loved reading Sandra Boynton's *Moo, Baa, La La La!* to my son. It was the first book to make him giggle uncontrollably. Sometimes the joy of reading as a child comes from being in the lap of a loved one.

What kind of reader were you?

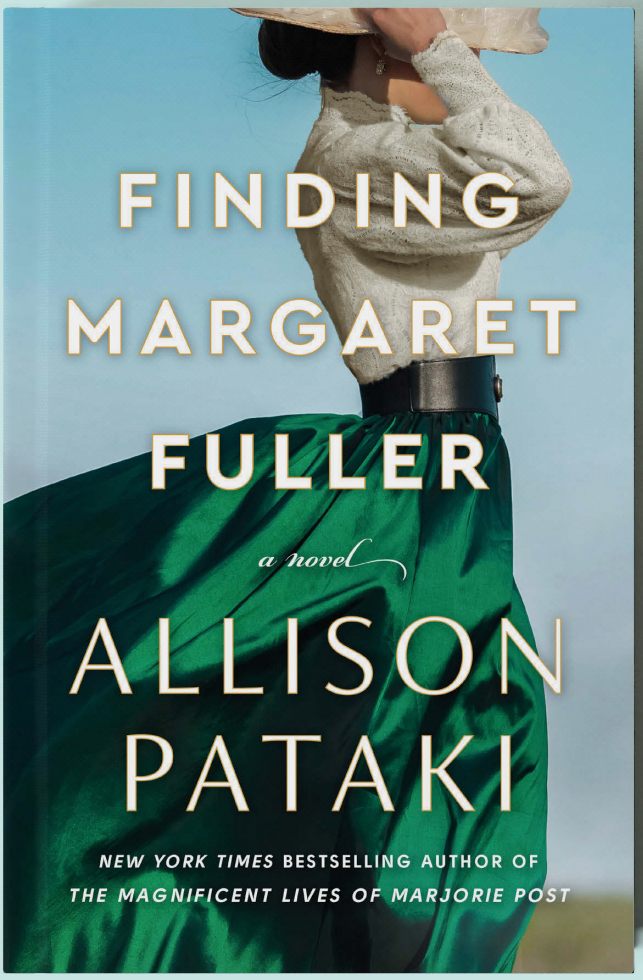
I enjoyed reading book series. *Encyclopedia Brown*, *Hardy Boys*, Marvel Comics, *Doc Savage*. A series provides both security and mystery. You know everything will eventually turn out okay, you just don't know how. A series is also an old-fashioned way to gamify reading, as you are compelled to progress through title after title.

You're forming a new book group. Who would you invite?

I am happy to name the nine other people in my current, long-standing book group. We were brought together by a common dear friend who was dying from cancer, and we've stayed together long after his passing. We come from different backgrounds and have complementary interests. We also have great connections that we've leveraged to get authors, including Walter Isaacson and Daniel Yergin, to join us virtually to discuss their books.

Where do you like reading?

I am mostly a digital reader these days, although I often have a physical book on my bedside table. I might describe myself as an opportunistic reader. I listen to books and *The Economist* while walking, cooking, or cleaning. I read while sitting in buses, subways, trains, planes, boats, and cars. I also read on the couch and in bed, although my to-do list and exhaustion often truncate those experiences.



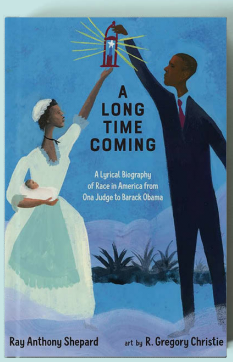
JILL ANDERSON

Do you have a favorite bookstore?

I love bookstores for their serendipity. I also used to enjoy visiting the stacks in Gutman Library, back when you had to find the book you wanted yourself. You see unexpected titles, and a bookstore in Cambridge or Concord will display different titles than a bookstore in Chicago, Raleigh, or Dallas, let alone Helsinki, Dublin, or Cairo.

What's next on your list?

I'm working my way through Mick Herron's *Slough House* series. I still love series. I would read mysteries with my mother and thrillers with my father. For more intellectual stimulation … books related to consciousness and the evolution of the mind have taken the top spot.

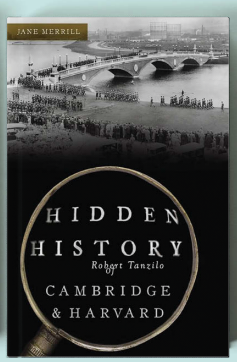


A Long Time Coming: A Lyrical Biography of Race in America from Ona Judge to Barack Obama

By Ray Anthony Shepard, M.A.T. '71

(CALKINS CREEK PRESS, 2023)

In this YA novel, written in lyrical verse, Ray Anthony Shepard highlights the struggles of six Black Americans from different eras, including the country's first Black president, Barack Obama; Ida B. Wells, an investigative journalist, activist, suffragette, and one of the founders of the NAACP; and Ona Judge, a former slave of George and Martha Washington who escaped to her freedom. *A Long Time Coming* is the third book written by Shepard, a former history teacher.

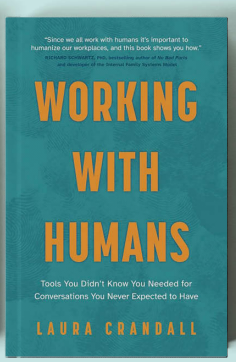


Hidden History of Cambridge & Harvard: Town & Gown

Jane Merrill, M.A.T.'71

(HISTORY PR, 2023)

Split into four parts — the early years, becoming the United States, the 19th century, and modern times — *Hidden History* is an historical look at the founding and growth of Harvard University and the city where it's located. Within each of the chapters, author Jane Merrill shares the lesser known history of the city and college, such as student protests and school pranks over the years, and highlights more well-known aspects such as Hasty Pudding, the final clubs, the Arnold Arboretum, Harvard Square, and local bridges.

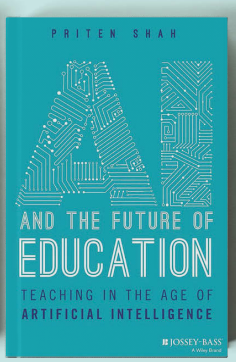


Working with Humans: Tools You Didn't Know You Needed for Conversations You Never Expected to Have

Laura Crandall, Ed.M.'09

(BANQUET PUBLISHING, 2023)

As Laura Crandall points out in *Working with Humans*, we all deal with situations at work that can be "concerning, confusing, or crazy-making." At the root of this, she writes, is not having and not using tools that we need to communicate well with one another — despite being in what we call the Information Age. Access isn't the issue. Our approach and how we communicate is. *Working with Humans* offers the tools needed to help manage teams (and yourself), navigate tricky situations at work, and lead with humanity.

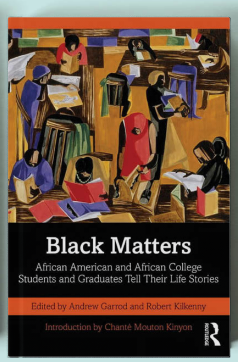


AI and the Future of Education: Teaching in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Priten Shah, Ed.M.'21

(JOHN WILEY & SONS, 2023)

Calling it a primer for educators to learn what artificial intelligence (AI) is and how students are using it, Priten Shah provides in *AI and the Future of Education* practical tips, tricks, and thought-provoking questions that educators can ask themselves as they weigh the opportunities, risks, and barriers AI brings to the classroom. She writes that while concerns over plagiarism and cheating often dominate conversations about AI, with this new book, she wants to present a more optimistic outlook at what AI can do for teaching and for learning.

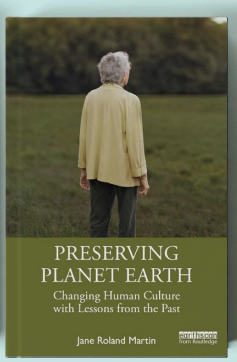


Black Matters: African American and African College Students and Graduates Tell Their Life Stories

Edited by Andrew Garrod, Ed.D.'82, and Robert Kilkenny, Ed.D.'92

(ROUTLEDGE, 2023)

In *Black Matters,* Andrew Garrod, a professor emeritus at Dartmouth College, and Robert Kilkenny, founder of the Alliance for Inclusion, pull together a collection of personal memoirs from 10 Black women and men, reflecting on their undergraduate experience at Dartmouth (plus four Dartmouth alumni looking back). As the book notes, the college's Black student population hovers at around 6%. The essays include moments and events that transformed students' academic, professional, and racial identities.



Preserving Planet Earth: Changing Human Culture with Lessons from the Past

Jane Roland Martin, Ed.M.'56

(ROUTLEDGE, 2024)

Preserving Planet Earth starts with a strong opening statement: "The red alert has sounded. Our planet's natural environment is in distress and the reason is us." As author Jane Roland Martin, a professor of philosophy emerita at UMass Boston writes, it's not the birds or the polar bears responsible for climate change and water shortages — it's humans who are destroying ecosystems and the world. Still, she writes, there is a lot people can do to positively move forward, including more of a focus on closing the knowledge and "doing" gaps.

Looking for past On My Bookshelf interviews? Go to *gse.harvard.edu/ed/bookshelf*

IN THE FIELD

The Write Kind of Programming

Afterschool nonprofit gives New York City students an edge in becoming authors and podcasters

Story by **Andrew Bauld, Ed.M.'16**

When the last school bell rings for the day, that's when **RACHAEL GAZDICK, ED.M.'99**, gets to work.

Gazdick is the CEO of New York Edge, the largest provider of afterschool and summer camp programming in New York City (NYC) and Long Island, which offers daily activities for more than 25,000 students across NYC's five boroughs. Projects range from the arts to sports and wellness to college and career readiness.

Gazdick calls the 30-year-old nonprofit a "hidden gem" for the metropolitan area, and since taking over in 2019, she's worked to elevate what afterschool time can look like by creating pathways for kids to imagine the kinds of adults they might become.

"I think we have to think of afterschool time as not just homework help or babysitting," she says. "These are really structured activities that are accelerating kids to the next level, to professions and areas we want to see them in."

It's led to some amazing partnerships and opportunities for students in New York City, from the flag football team getting to play their final game at the stadium where the New York Jets play, to getting to study up close a museum-quality replica of a Van Gogh work thanks to the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

But perhaps nowhere is Gazdick's goal to show students what's possible better illustrated than in her student book publishing initiative. Inspired by a similar project Gazdick worked on as a faculty member at Syracuse University, New York Edge's version teaches students how to write and think critically, "and get them excited about researching, writing, and thinking about what their stories are," Gazdick says. "You see kids shine when they see how this could become a career, whether illustration or writing or research."

Middle school students work directly with award-winning children's book author Jesse Byrd to learn about the writing process before writing their own stories. They are also paired with professional illustrators with different styles who illustrate the student books and bring them to life.

When they're finished, the books are professionally published. This year, students celebrated with a book release celebration for families and classmates at the famed Strand Bookstore in Manhattan.

The program is in its third year and already has produced six books that are all available for sale, with five more in progress, but Gazdick has bigger aspirations. Her goal is to expand funding to provide access to even more students and eventually to offer their own publishing company.

Getting to interact with professionals is an important part of what makes the organization so impactful, and that theme is what drove New York Edge to also launch their own podcast, *Formative*. The podcast features conversations between students and adults from an assortment of careers, including a NASA astronaut, a Tony award-winning producer, and a New York congresswoman.

More than just getting to meet famous people, Gazdick wants students to feel like they belong right alongside such accomplished individuals. It's a philosophy she first honed through an adult literacy program she launched with Professor Jeanne Chall while earning her master's at the Ed School.

"I said to her, we need to bring adult learners on campus so they can see themselves here," Gazdick says. As part of the program, Gazdick set up a pen pal project. One Ed School student spent the entire time emailing with a person Gazdick only described to her as an active duty servicemember.

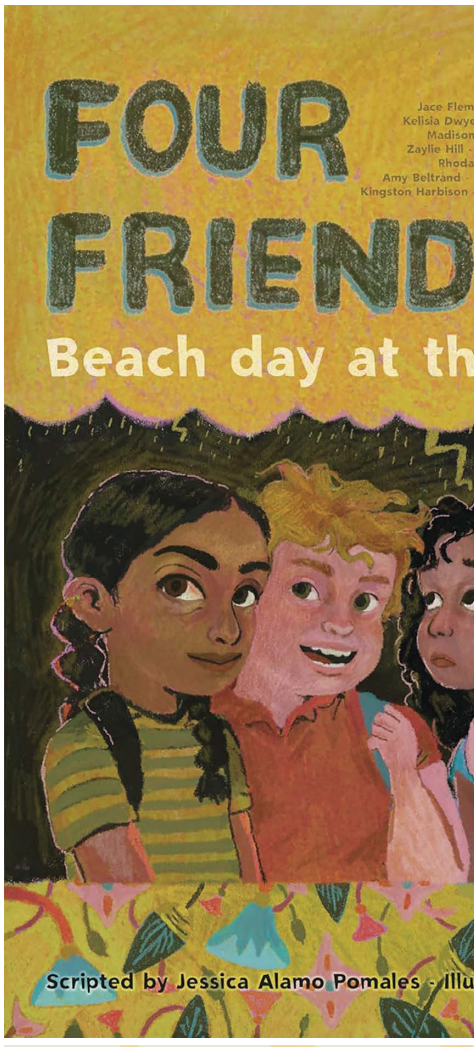
"She wrote to him, and she was engaged, and I told her later that she had been writing to a general under Colin Powell," Gazdick says, referring to the former U.S. secretary of state.

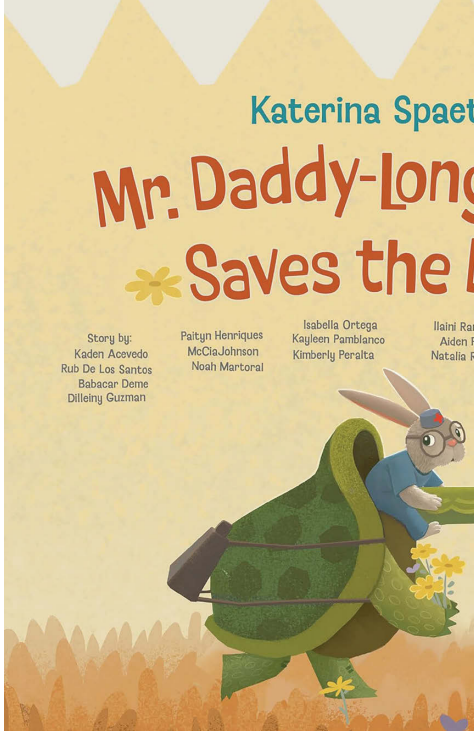
Gazdick says the student was upset at first, saying she never would have sent [certain] questions to her pen pal if she had known who she was writing to, but the student also recognized the confidence she had gained thanks to the experience.

It's the same idea with New York Edge and its catalog of projects that provide students with the opportunities and most importantly, the same confidence, to make their dreams a reality.

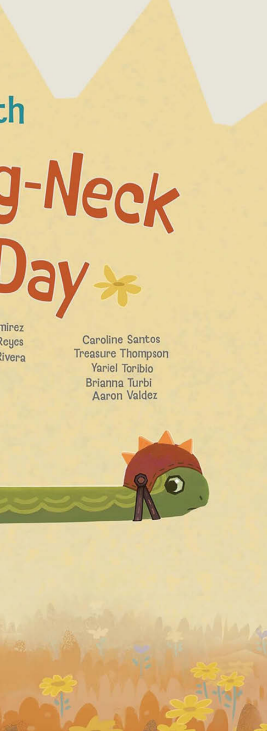
"There's one thing about learning," she says. "There's another about feeling like you belong in the space." □

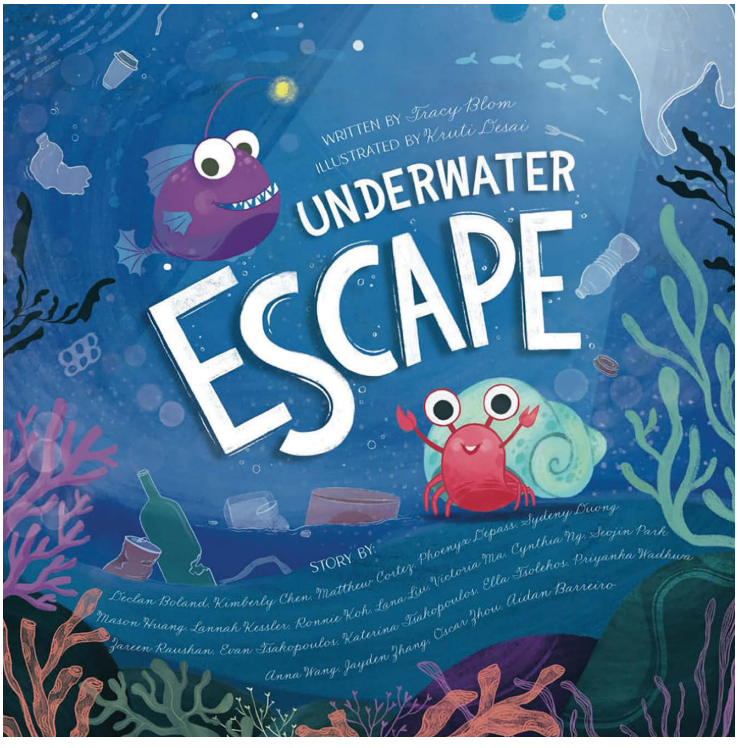
ANDREW BAULD, ED.M.'16, is a writer based in New York. His last *Ed.* piece profiled Patrick Tutwiler, Ed.M.'00





A few of the 2024 student-written books published by New York Edge





> We're raising our children to just think, to just be stoic, to just want our autonomy, especially our boys and men. In such a culture, we disconnect from our own desires, our own needs, and the needs of others. And then we have a crisis of connection.

NIOBE WAY, ED.D.'94, during an episode of the Harvard EdCast, discussing how everyone, but especially boys in our culture, are taught to disconnect from their feelings and emotional sensitivity

CAMPUS

Different Voice Amplified

Editors at *HER* revisit Carol Gilligan's groundbreaking essay

Story by **Lory Hough**

Last summer, a proposal landed on the editors' desk at *Harvard Educational Review (HER)*. Sent by **RANDY TESTA, ED.M.'78, ED.D.'90**, a former senior project manager at the Ed School, the proposal suggested doing something in a future issue to commemorate Carol Gilligan's groundbreaking essay, "In a Different Voice," which had first been published in *HER*'s December 1977 issue. The piece argued that developmental theory has not given adequate attention to the concerns and experience of women on many issues, including abortion.

It was a tricky proposition, given that when Gilligan first submitted the essay in 1977, it was rejected, twice, by *HER* editors before eventually running. But Testa felt it was the right time to revisit the original piece, which eventually became a book that became a bestseller.

"I pointed out the timeliness of addressing Gilligan's essay ahead of its 45th anniversary and particularly on the heels of the Supreme Court's then-recent *Dobbs* decision, which overturned *Roe v. Wade*" in 2022, Testa says.

Luckily, this time, the *HER* editorial staff responded with excitement and agreed to publish six essays in their spring 2024 issue that were written by former students of Gilligan, who taught at the Ed School for 15 years. The essays focused on the relevance of the 1977 essay for today, as well as its impact on the writers' work. Testa, who was one of those students, also suggested they rerun Gilligan's original essay as a way to introduce her work to a new generation of students and readers.

Caroline Tucker, a current Ph.D. student and *HER* co-editor, remembers that the prospect of honoring Gilligan created a "buzz" among the journal student staff.

"The board found the subject matter incredibly relevant to the present moment," she says. "Furthermore, we were all curious to learn more about the history of *HER* and HGSE through working with Randy and the other authors. *HER* doesn't reprint past pieces often, but the board felt that revisiting this piece and Gilligan's commitment to amplifying 'different voices' was aligned with our mission and worthwhile for our readers."

Co-editor Kemeyawi Wahpepah, also a Ph.D. student, feels that Gilligan's essay, even years later, is still incredibly valuable for readers.

"Gilligan's paradigm-shifting article highlighted how much we have to gain from actively engaging with marginalized perspectives," she says. "At a moment when the autonomy and safety of many people — including women and girls — is being challenged across the nation and the globe, it is more important than ever to center the voices of marginalized groups in our academic endeavors."

It has also been important for Wahpepah personally.

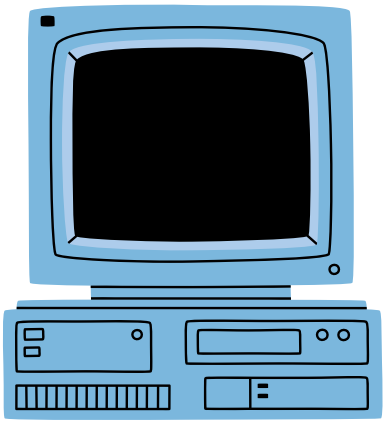
"As a former teacher at a girls' school, which emphasized the importance of educational research on girls' education and development, I found Gilligan's work extremely relevant to my own professional experiences," she says. "Furthermore, as a Native scholar who works to counteract the erasure of Native stories of attending school in the United States, I found that Gilligan's firm insistence on taking marginalized voices seriously within the field of education provided an inspiring and instructive model for my own work."

Testa says that he reached out to Gilligan and she was happy to hear that her essay was finding a home again with *HER*.

"I believe Carol is deeply gratified to see her essay come full-circle, that is, initially looked with derision — 'this is not social science' — to now being the subject of a special 'symposium' section of the *Harvard Educational Review*," he says. "This re-instatement is also emblematic of what has happened to the field of women's psychology/development and to Carol's research and scholarship." □

ILLUSTRATION BY **PING ZHU**

TIP SHEET



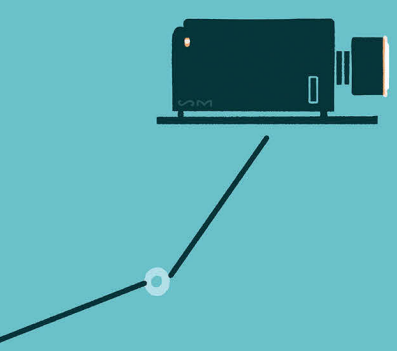
▸ Have you checked out the Ideas and Impact section of the Ed School's website? It's where we collect all of the stories that we create (written and recorded), including alumni profiles, Usable Knowledge pieces for practitioners, *Ed.* magazine stories, interviews from the EdCast podcast, and coverage of our Education Now webinar series.

To get to Ideas and Impact, scan this QR code!

▸ Graduates interested in taking a Professional Education Program course at the Ed School: the program offers a 25% discount to all Ed School degree graduates for select programs in early education, K-12, and higher education. Some programs are offered online, some in person.

Scan this QR code to learn more. When signing up, use "ALUM2025" to receive the discount.

Practice



“I realized that at 44, I wanted to go back to school. To friends and family, I called it my mid-life crisis master’s degree.”

BIANCA TURETSKY, CURRENT MASTER’S STUDENT (SEE P. 52)

ILLUSTRATION BY **SIMONE MASSONI**

No

Signal

Is it finally time to ban phones from schools?

Story by
Elaine McArdle

Illustrations by
Renaud Vigourt

As one of 64 ninth graders in the inaugural class of the new Cristo Rey Jesuit Seattle High School, in Seattle, Washington, where **KATIE SELTZER, ED.M.'22**, works and which opened its doors in August 2024, Aniya M. was vaguely aware the school had some sort of cellphone policy. But only after she began texting her mom during lunch — and got what she calls a "very polite" reminder to put her phone away lest it be confiscated — did she understand that phones are banned entirely during the school day.

"I was kind of shocked," says Aniya, 14, who says she enrolled at the Seattle school — the newest in the 40-school Cristo Rey network of private, Catholic, college-preparatory schools exclusively serving students from families of limited economic means — because it offers "a ton of opportunities for my future." [At the school's request, students are being identified only by their first names and last initials.]

Shock aside, within a week or so she discovered something unexpected about ditching her phone. "It is definitely helping me focus more in class," says Aniya, who says she wants to become a psychotherapist someday. "And it's pushing me to reach out more to my peers instead of relying more on my phone, like I did in middle school. I have a bit of social anxiety so don't like connecting with people. But the friends I've made are great, so I'm kind of glad we have that cellphone policy and we're encouraged to talk to each other."

Her classmate Sofia J., who plans to become a pediatrician, was also unaware of the policy. "Now that I'm actually attending Cristo Rey, I feel the cellphone ban is beneficial," she says. "I noticed I was participating more and engaging more in the classes I was taking. Even though I love using my phone, it's not something I need during the school day. My education is more important." As for making friends? "The in-person interactions are *definitely* more helpful than being on social media," she emphasizes.

Elena J., who plans to become a lawyer, chose Cristo Rey because of its proven success in college acceptance rates and its unique model: students work one day a week at places like Microsoft and the Space Needle through the Corporate Work Study program. "I felt an increase in focus because I don't have to worry about my phone at all," she says. She and her friends are so interested in each other and school they don't miss the devices, she says, adding, "I don't see the need for [phones] in school for any reason. I read a study once on using phones during class, that it takes up to 20 minutes to focus back on the subject you're doing in class. I feel like that is true."

Cristo Rey student Cole M., who hopes to become a pediatrician, says that while smartphones aren't a distraction for him personally, they can be for others and so he understands the rule and has easily adjusted to it. And Sincere B., who wants to become a mental health counselor, agrees that phone use during class is detrimental because "you're not really focused, and you won't get any work done. At a school like Cristo Rey, you need to be doing the best you can so you can succeed." Although she wishes they could use phones during breaks, she admits they are a distraction: "Even when I'm not at school, having my phone makes it harder for me to get up and do what I need to do."

Are other classmates missing their phones, and maybe criticizing the policy? "No, not really," says Aniya. "It really doesn't come up that often because we are encouraged to talk to each other more."

Of course, the opinions of five highly motivated ninth graders at a single high school hardly make for a scientific survey. But these voices present a point of view not widely explored in media reports about phone bans: those of the students themselves. None of the five interviewed here objects to being without their phones during class. A couple said they would like phone access during lunch, but all evinced being relieved, even happy, to not have to exert self-discipline over a device that's as attractive (many would say addictive) as a portable mini computer with internet access.

What the Data Says

What if you could design a school where students are focused on learning during class, engaging fully with each other during recess and lunch, and free (at least during the school day) from cyberbullying, social media, texts, video games, and other distractions?

It's simple: ban smartphones. It's a widespread and growing trend.

More than 75% of public schools in the United States banned cellphone use in one form or another in the 2021-22 school year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. In 2023, Florida became the first state to ban cellphone use during class time, though districts can decide whether to allow it during lunch and breaks. As of August 2024, eight other states — Louisiana, South Carolina, Indiana, Virginia, Ohio, Minnesota, Delaware, and Pennsylvania — have adopted policies or laws to curtail cellphone use in schools, according to *The New York Times*. New York Governor Kathy Hochul plans to submit legislation in 2025 to ban smartphones at schools, and in August 2024, California Governor Gavin Newsom urged school districts to limit their use in class. Other states, including Oklahoma, Kansas, and Vermont, are considering similar restrictions.

This accelerating approach across the country is spurred not only by the concerns of frustrated educators — 72% of high school teachers say students distracted by cellphones is a major problem, according to a 2024 study by the Pew Research Center — but a persuasive body of research.

A 2024 report from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health found that among middle schoolers in Norway, a recent cellphone ban "significantly decreased" mental health challenges among girls and improved their grades, and decreased bullying by more than 40% among both boys and girls. These results were even greater for girls from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the report found.

Just having their phone nearby distracts students during class, according to UNESCO's *2023 Global Education Monitoring Report*, which recommends against technology in classrooms — including smartphones — unless it supports learning outcomes. Indeed, as Elena J. noted in a report she read, it can take up to 20 minutes for a student to refocus on learning once distracted by a phone, while the absence of smartphones improved learning, especially for students who are struggling.

In his 2024 *New York Times* bestselling book, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt advocates for

"We have a rare opportunity to do things from the start, instead of doing a turnaround with cellphone bans."

Katie Seltzer

JAMISON WEEKS

phone-free schools, and argues that kids shouldn't have smartphones before high school or access to social media before age 16. And in June 2024, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, noting that social media is an "important contributor" to the current mental health crisis among youth, called for a surgeon general's warning to be applied to social media platforms. He also urged schools to keep social time, in addition to class time, free from phones so that students can interact in person.

With so much data supporting the benefit of phone-free schools, who's arguing in favor of them?

According to a 2024 report by the National Parents Union, 78% of parents think their kids should have access to their cellphones at some points during the school day. In this tragic age of school shootings, many parents and kids feel safer knowing they can get in touch with each other during an emergency at school.

"Schools regularly experience events that are scary, and parents want to communicate with their children at any time [in order to] make sure they are safe," says Victor Pereira, faculty co-chair of the Ed School's Teaching and Teacher Leadership (TTL) Program. For parents, a complete cellphone ban "can be scary," he says, "so schools have to consider how to alleviate that anxiety" — for example, by assuring parents they can always contact the office to reach their child.

Others believe that easily available cellphones actually pose a greater danger to students during such a situation. "It shouldn't be your top priority to use your phone during an emergency," says Elena J. "We'd just go all crazy calling our parents and we wouldn't be paying attention to the teachers" trying to keep them safe.

Another challenge? Students, for whom smartphone use is as pervasive and seemingly natural as breathing, may find it very difficult to do without it. Most teens are on their smartphones more than four hours a day, and they pick up their phones at a median of 51 times per day, with some doing so nearly 500 times a day, according to Common Sense Media. Mental health experts differ on whether overuse of a smartphone is a true addiction, but there's no question it can be very hard to get kids — or anyone else — to ignore their phones.

And is anything positive lost by banning phones at school? Can't they be a learning tool that enhances education? And practically, how can educators institute an effective ban to achieve the results they want?

"Schools regularly experience events that are scary, and parents want to communicate with their children at any time [in order to] make sure they are safe."

Victor Pereira

One School's Approach

The educators who designed Cristo Rey Jesuit Seattle knew they had an opportunity to run an experiment, one they believed would greatly benefit their student body.

In contrast to existing schools trying to implement a new ban among students used to having phones in class and during breaks, "We have a rare opportunity to do things from the start, instead of doing a turnaround with cellphone bans," says Seltzer, who serves as vice president of the school's Corporate Work Study program.

Among the dozens of Cristo Rey schools nationally, 100% of graduates are accepted to four-year colleges, and they graduate from college at two times the rate of their socio-economic peers, Seltzer says, adding, "It's a proven model and a successful model."

But the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the educational experience of students everywhere, including the school's first cohort,

who were in elementary school when it hit.

As school leaders contemplated how to best help them catch up, removing the distraction of phones seemed like low-hanging fruit.

"[We] need to ensure that our students continue to succeed in their college persistence, knowing they are often tasked with catch-up work because they often haven't had access to high-quality and rigorous education prior to coming to our schools," Seltzer says. "The impact on learning or productivity in the classroom or workplace is stark when every minute counts, particularly for students that haven't had the same access to rigorous instruction that some students have access to."

The same with socialization. "If as soon as they leave the classroom, they pull out their phones, they're not there in the hallway with their peers in the same way," says Seltzer, who is on the school's executive leadership team that decided to adopt a no-phone policy. (Not all Cristo Rey schools do so.) "As a faith-based school, it is critical to our beliefs that we are a human family and to connect in person is the best way to create community." A no-phone policy "supports our goal in the uninterrupted focus on our classwork and our professional work in our work-study program."

Cristo Rey Seattle students put phones in their lockers in the morning and don't take them out again until they head home. That means they not only concentrate better in class but build real, in-person relationships during breaks and lunch, school leaders believe.

"This is rooted in research," she emphasizes, including the 2024 Norwegian public health report that notes the disproportionate negative impact of smartphones in schools on girls from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The school launched in August 2024 with a three-week summer program to introduce students to workplace skills they will use in their corporate placements. Cellphones were excluded. "We got some grumbles," Seltzer says, with some students expressing they'd like access during lunchtime. Seltzer sees that as a measure of success, "a concession of them realizing, 'Maybe I don't need it all day.'"

Still, school leaders are open to seeing how, as the initial cohort adapts to the policy and then graduates to higher grades, they might adjust the no-phone policy for students who demonstrate an ability to use phones appropriately. Eventually, she says, "as our students grow and mature, we will be building opportunities to decide how to use [the phone] for executive functioning and calendaring."

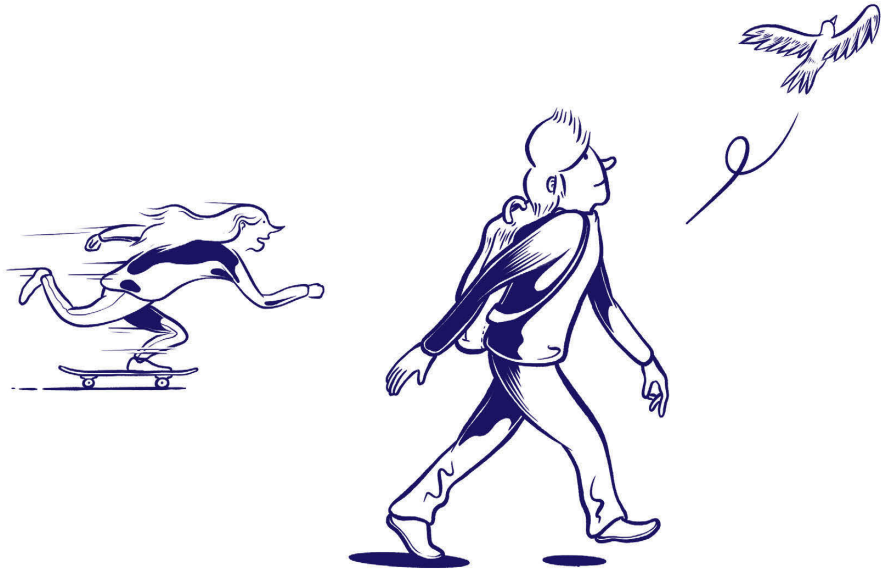
Using Them as Tools

Louis Chugranis, a current student in the Online Master's in Education Program, would agree with that approach. A teacher since 2006 — today, he's a technology teacher at South Orangetown Middle School in Blauvelt, New York — Chugranis considers the smartphone "one of humankind's great inventions," which, with appropriate use, can be an educational asset.

Rather than a blanket ban, "I think we need to think more deliberately and intentionally about how to use smartphones in educational settings with our students," Chugranis says. Although he has ongoing concerns about cyberbullying and other negative aspects, he has also experienced smartphones as a useful tool; for example, for students in design class to photograph structural details in a building that they can model for their own work.

Louis Chugranis

"We need to think more deliberately and intentionally about how to use smartphones ... because obviously they can be used as powerful teaching devices."



DAVID ELMES (LEFT); COURTESY LOUIS CHUGRANIS

"We're not for or against cellphone bans … but we've learned that schools that take the time to listen [to students] seem to end up in interesting places."

Emily Weinstein

"If people are saying that smartphones should never be used in schools, I think that would be a myopic perspective," he says. "The question is, how do we use smartphones in school with students in an educationally appropriate way while preventing all those other uses?" That, he says, we haven't quite figured out yet.

Chugranis says he hopes to see thought leaders, including educational experts at the Ed School, and neuroscientists, physicians, psychologists, parents, and students, explore how to promote smartphone benefits for kids while minimizing the dangers.

"I think the real problem is not should we use them or not, but how can we use them safely and appropriately to improve learning for students and to improve teaching, because obviously they can be used as powerful teaching devices," he says.

Cole M. agrees that smartphones can be useful in the classroom, especially since school laptops are much slower at accessing educational apps and websites.

Phones "also pose as a great communication tool between students and teachers," he says, "like if you want to know what to do on this assignment, or for impromptu class updates." However, he's "not quite sure" whether the pros outweigh the cons.

Pereira also believes that phones, used properly, can be a useful tool given the enormous number of educational apps and assessment tools available. But whatever a school's policy, it should be consistently and equitably applied, he says. The policy should come from the top, rather than leaving it to individual teachers to administer so that students don't have different rules in different classes. "That can be challenging for teachers to manage," he says.

"We've heard over the last two to three years how hard it is for educators, that, 'We did not choose to give your child a phone and we're now in position of having to be the arbiter and manage it,'" explains **EMILY WEINSTEIN, ED.M.'14, ED.D.'17**, co-founder and executive director of the Ed School's new Center for Digital Thriving, a research center under Project Zero focused on developing a nuanced view of tech in our lives. "Because of that, a top-down policy can feel to some teachers like a huge relief because they aren't having to make decisions at the classroom level."

She advises administrators to recognize that dilemma and listen to teachers as a constituent group.

Include the Students

In fact, engaging and listening to stakeholders is key to a successful policy, insist Weinstein and Carrie James, the center's managing director and co-founder. And on issues of technology and the digital world, they care deeply about what young people think. Too often in these discussions, including the smartphone debate, adults make decisions without understanding the perspectives of a younger generation for whom the digital world is second nature.

Over the past decade, Weinstein and James have worked with thousands of students and hundreds of educators on digital and tech topics. They are co-authors of *Behind Their Screens: What Teens are Facing (and Adults are Missing)*, which drew on the insights and viewpoints of 3,500 youth, and, in turn, spurred them to launch the center in the fall of 2023.

For educators considering smartphone and other technology policies, they have strong advice based on their research: make sure

COURTESY EMILY WEINSTEIN

to include students. "We're not for or against cellphone bans — we see a lot of wisdom in these efforts — but we've learned that schools that take the time to listen [to students] seem to end up in interesting places," says Weinstein.

For one thing, they suggest holding listening sessions before introducing new policies. Survey students and parents about what is working well — or not — with an existing policy and ask what they wish decisionmakers knew about the pros and cons of any new policy, she advises.

"Carrie and I have found that a youth advisory is truly game changing," Weinstein says, "because there are blind spots we have as adults." Without a youth perspective, she says, "so often we end up missing the mark."

In their work, they've learned from youth "that sometimes adding is as important as subtracting," Weinstein says. "So, if you're subtracting cellphones, it's a natural opportunity to consider what you might need to introduce so you are enriching students' experiences." One school added tether ball sets to the playground. "Or you could add board games in the cafeteria, or you may hear what additional supports students need to feel safe" without phones.

By eliciting community input, educators have the opportunity to understand the reasons for any resistance to new rules; for example, a student may reveal they need a phone because they are the caregiver for a younger sibling. "That doesn't mean you can't go to a policy like a cellphone ban, but it means creating ways for communities to give feedback before the ban occurs or at least as you're gearing up for it," says Weinstein, who also suggests communicating to parents and students how you are dealing with their concerns.

Another piece of wisdom they've learned: when implementing new tech policies, "consistency in the early weeks of school makes a big difference," she says — like the gentle reminder Aniya received to put her cellphone away when she was texting her mom as a new student at Cristo Rey. Though the policy has been an adjustment, when asked if she likes her new school, Aniya smiles broadly. "Yes," she says. "Very much." □

Elaine McArdle is a writer based in New York. Her story on chronic absenteeism appeared in the spring/summer 2024 issue

72%

PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS THAT SAY STUDENTS DISTRACTED BY CELLPHONES IS A MAJOR PROBLEM

THE Q&A

Repeat Nominee

Alum makes Massachusetts Teacher of the Year finals a second time

Story by **Lory Hough**

It's the kind of email every faculty member wants to get. The one where they learn that a former student has been honored in a big way and says thank you to the faculty member for playing a role. Senior Lecturer Pamela Mason received such an email earlier this summer from **LUISA SPARROW, ED.M.'14**, a special education teacher in Boston Public Schools. Sparrow shared that she was a Massachusetts Teacher of the Year finalist — for the second year in a row. Sparrow spoke to *Ed.* at the end of the summer about the honor and the role Mason and others have had on her career.

What do you teach?

I teach a combined fifth and sixth grade class for students with significant intellectual disabilities. It's a self-contained classroom, meaning we teach all academic subjects. We also teach instrumental activities of daily living, which are often called "life skills." The main life skills we address are personal hygiene, shopping for groceries, community navigation, and for some students, toileting. By "we" I mean the amazing paraprofessionals I work with every day.

You taught similar grades in other places. What about this age appeals to you?

Prior to coming to the Perry School, I taught at two schools in Texas, one school in Costa Rica, and a charter school in Boston, Match Community Day. I have taught in the range of grades 3–6 in all of these schools. I love this age group because they are still excited about school, but they are old enough to have interesting discussions about what they're learning. More than the specific age group I work with, though, I really love working with students with significant disabilities. I love being able to focus on ways to support my students in developing greater independence and in accessing the greater community, in addition to focusing on academic skills.

When did you know you wanted to be a teacher?

Teaching has always been on my radar. When I was a kid, I loved playing school with my younger sister and "teaching" her how to read, which I didn't actually do, ha-ha. I always enjoyed helping my friends with confusing homework questions. I didn't start college with the set intention of becoming a teacher, but I was very drawn to the mission of Teach For America, and once I started teaching through that program, I realized how much I love it.

It's a process being nominated for Teacher of the Year!

For me, the process began in February. This final round, which involves a classroom visit from the selection

"It is nerve-wracking to feel like your practice is being evaluated based on a single observation."

committee, plus an interview with the selection committee and former state teachers of the year, is the most challenging. On the one hand, since I teach every day, the classroom visit is not so different from my typical day-to-day. On the other hand, it is nerve-wracking to feel like your practice is being evaluated based on a single observation, when so much of teaching relies on the small ways you build relationships with students and foster learning day by day, over the course of an entire year, or in my case, multiple years, since I teach most of my students for more than one year. I do believe the panel considers all parts of the application process and doesn't look at the observation in isolation, but it can be hard to remember this in the moment.

What Ed School courses still have an impact on your career?

The courses I took at HGSE continue to have a huge impact on my current work. Senior Lecturer Pamela Mason's course, Literacy Assessment and Intervention Practicum, has been instrumental in helping me design and implement literacy instruction with upper elementary students who are working on foundational literacy skills. Senior Lecturer Karen Mapp's class, Elements of Effective Family-School Partnerships, inspired me to seek more family input when designing my curriculum, and has had an impact on how I engage with my daughters' teachers since becoming a parent. Implementing Inclusive Education, taught by Professor Tom Hehir, was pivotal in shaping my thinking about how expanding inclusive learning opportunities for students with disabilities benefits really everyone.

People often say that teaching is a calling. Was it for you?

It is a calling for me, in that I feel strongly pulled to it. I'm constantly thinking about new things to try with my students. For the two years I was working on Teach For America's full-time staff, every time I observed in my corps members' classrooms, I missed being in the teacher position myself. When I watched my corps members try exciting strategies, I found myself thinking, "I can't wait to try that with my students!" Finally, I listened to that voice and decided it was time to return to the classroom after going to graduate school to learn how to be a more effective reading teacher, which is what led me to HGSE. While I have tiring days at school, overall, I feel deeply energized by my daily work. For me, yes, it's a calling.

Do you think it has to be?

I do think there's room for people who feel like teaching is more of a job than a calling, and I think teachers who feel this way can be very effective. I also think whether teaching feels like a calling versus a job can depend on finding the right fit: In one teaching context or grade level, teaching might feel like a stressful job leading to burn out, while in another context, teaching can feel like an energizing calling. Just as with any job, a particular teaching context that might feel draining to one person can be revitalizing to another person. □

ILLUSTRATION BY **PING ZHU**

"I am deeply honored to serve in the role of interim dean. I have seen firsthand the positive impact that our exceptional faculty, dedicated staff, and inspiring students and alumni make in the field of education. Their steadfast commitment to our mission — and expanding educational opportunities for learners everywhere — is a source of energy and hope."

Professor Nonie Lesaux, who serves as co-chair of the Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative, after being named interim dean of the Ed School at the end of the 2023–24 academic year when Bridget Terry Long stepped down from the role

COURTESY LUISA SPARROW

IN THE FIELD

Do We Segregate Students on IEPs?

New book says we do, but it doesn't have to be that way

Story by **Andrew Bauld, Ed.M.'16**

Despite decades of work to desegregate American public schools, students with disabilities often find themselves separated and isolated from their peers.

So, when educational researcher **YENDA PRADO, ED.M.'05**, walked into Future Visions Academy (FVA), a full-inclusion public elementary charter school in California, it was like nothing she had seen before.

Prado arrived at FVA as a graduate student from University of California, Irvine. She was there to observe and support the school as part of her doctoral work, but what was supposed to be a yearlong project ended up turning into nearly three years of her life, resulting in Prado's first book, *Voices on the Margins*, published by MIT Press.

What was it about FVA that so captured Prado's attention?

"I started seeing so many interesting things happening that I felt weren't happening at other schools, and I wanted people to know," Prado says. "And in many ways, this is a neglected area of research. Yes, there is research on special education, and some on inclusive education, but this interdisciplinary approach of looking at inclusion through a technology lens in a fully inclusive education context, that was something unique."

Prado has used FVA as a case study to explore the use of technology to support inclusion and language and literacy learning. That includes digital tools like screen readability for eye tracking for students who can't use their hands, computer-assisted instruction for decoding, and text-to-speech software that allows students to participate in class discussion.

At FVA, Prado saw this type of technology being used collaboratively between all students, whether they needed the tools or not. That's a far cry from most U.S. classrooms. As she writes in her book, 63% of all students with an individualized education program (IEP), spend nearly 20% of their time learning in segregated classes and their time is spent 1:1 with a device.

"Students with IEPs who are separated from their peers are lacking access to the full diversity of socialization opportunities," Prado says. "They are missing access to their peers and are missing access to some of the more unstructured learning opportunities that occur with those peers."

One example at FVA Prado cites is several minimally speaking students who used assistive devices to communicate. In many learning settings, students requiring such devices might be separated or be the only ones using them to communicate. But at FVA, students with disabilities were intentionally included. Teachers learned how to use the devices, as did classmates who didn't need them, and then both groups engaged with students who did.

Prado has spent her career exploring how emerging technologies and media can support classrooms so that all students, regardless of differences, can learn together. That work has taken her beyond the classroom, serving as an adviser for the PBS Kids animated series, *Lyla in the Loop*, and as an emerging technologies impact fellow for the U.S. Department of Education.

But perhaps the biggest impact on Prado's interest in inclusive learning comes from her own time as a student in the classroom. Arriving in the United States from Mexico as a 5-year-old, Prado was both an English language learner and a student with an IEP.

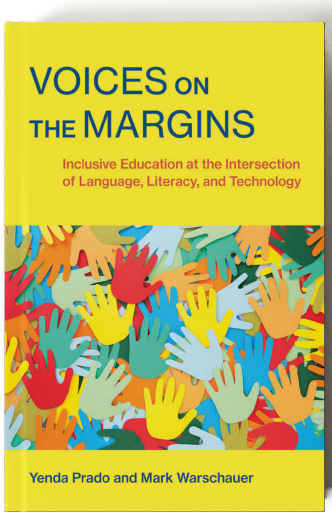
"Navigating the school system very much shaped my philosophy around inclusive education," Prado says. Ever since, she says her work has centered on equity and "really taking the things I've seen both professionally and academically, the things I've seen work for kids, and trying to minimize the things that don't."

She admits that FVA is a unique environment. It features a team-teaching model, where general education and special education teachers collaborate, and students also have access to a team of paraprofessionals. But although this is a model that requires considerable resources, Prado believes that even traditional schools can still learn and implement aspects of what FVA is doing through small tweaks.

"Using tech to make spaces more inclusive can be intimidating, which is why I wanted to include examples to show how to include kids in classroom discussions," Prado says. One example includes teaching an entire class how to sign as opposed to just the one student who needs it.

Ultimately, positive change is "little shifts about how to use the technology" and other tools in ways that promote inclusivity and community.

"It all ties into this idea of interdependence," Prado says. "How do we get to a place where we are all working in collaborative and interconnected ways for the broader social good?" □



"Students with IEPs who are separated from their peers are lacking access to the full diversity of socialization opportunities."
YENDA PRADO

ANDREW BAULD, ED.M.'16, is a writer based in New York

COURTESY YENDA PRADO

Yenda Prado

ON MY MIND

My Midlife-Crisis Master's Degree

Forget the sports car. Go back to school

Story by **Bianca Turetsky**

"Do you own a CD?"

"Do you know how to use a rotary phone?"

"CD?"

"Rotary phone?"

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

I am standing in the packed hallway of the Radcliffe Gymnasium for our ELOE orientation. We are in the midst of a "people scavenger hunt," trying to check off as many folks on our list who meet the requirements. It's hard to tell who may have taught social studies or who has three siblings. Apparently, it's not that difficult to tell that I do in fact own a CD (okay several Case Logic books full of CDs) and am currently having vivid flashbacks to my childhood kitchen, seeing the pencil marks on the dial face of our rotary phone and the effort it took to make a local phone call. Forget about long distance.

To be honest, I didn't expect my 40s to look like this.

It's so much better.

I have been lucky enough to have spent the better part of my adult life writing books for kids and tweens. Starting in 2012, I published my first book in a YA historical fiction series called *The Time-Traveling Fashionista*, which has been translated into nine languages and is currently in development for television. The books are about a thrift store obsessed seventh grader, Louise Lambert, who is desperate to leave her humdrum suburban middle school life. Through the help of some magical vintage clothing, Louise travels back in time and experiences adventures beyond her middle school cafeteria. Like onboard the Titanic or in the gilded halls of the Palace of Versailles. Much like my 12-year-old protagonist, I never wanted to have an ordinary, linear life.

After my novel's publication, I started going into schools and speaking to kids about my books and the writing process. We played writing games, and I helped them create their own stories. After years of solitary writing, getting to interact with kids was so much more fun than I had anticipated. Through these publicity events I discovered that I loved connecting with young readers in their classrooms. Their creativity and imagination lit me up. Soon I was booking more and more school talks and classroom visits.

I followed this new passion and started teaching with an award-winning nonprofit, Writopia Lab. Its mission is to foster joy, literacy, and critical thinking in kids and teens from all backgrounds through creative writing. After a few years I was an associate director and managing the Brooklyn region. I was teaching

"After years of solitary writing, getting to interact with kids was so much more fun than I had anticipated."

at a wide array of spaces: our labs, in schools, at museums, in juvenile facilities, and on Zoom. I saw firsthand just how powerful and universal writing is. But as I came to this meaningful work through my books, I didn't have the educational foundation I felt like I needed to serve our kids the best way that I could. I felt stuck and like I needed a big life change.

I realized that at 44, I wanted to go back to school. To friends and family, I called it my mid-life crisis master's degree.

So here I am at HGSE.

In a way, like Louise, I am getting to time travel now, too. Being back in a classroom after 20-plus years feels like I am getting a second chance to do college. My first time around, at Tufts in 1998, I was filled with anxiety (well, technically, a yet-undiagnosed panic disorder) and worried about all the wrong things: grades, boys, tests, and not having class before 10 a.m. Now I know how lucky I am to be here, surrounded by a community of people who want to change the world through education. At 44, I still have some of my same hang ups I did at 20, but I also have the life experience and perspective that comes with a few gray hairs. When I got my first book deal, my editor didn't ask to see my GPA.

I've found the older I get the less often I put myself in situations where I am not an expert at something. I don't think this is a good thing. Two weeks of the Evidence course made me see this. There were days when I went home frustrated and felt like I was reading another language of "RCTs" and "RDDs." When I had to resubmit an individual readiness assurance test and still needed to make dinner for my stepson, I started to wonder why I was voluntarily subjecting myself to this. But presenting our team's project on the last day to our supportive and brilliant TF who is younger than I am, I felt really proud of myself. I couldn't think of a safer and more supportive space to embark on this work than here at HGSE.

My stepson and I will both be graduating this spring, luckily on different weekends. He'll be 22 and I'll be 45 when we accept our diplomas. I imagine we'll be celebrating in much different ways. (I, for instance, hope to be asleep by 9:30 p.m.) But what I wish for him is what I wish for all my young writers and readers: a lifetime of learning. And perhaps a life a little less ordinary. Maybe he'll get his own mid-life crisis master's degree one day, too. □

BIANCA TURETSKY is a current master's student in the Education Leadership, Organizations, and Entrepreneurship (ELOE) Program

COURTESY BIANCA TURETSKY

ILLUSTRATION BY **PING ZHU**

BIG TALK

> In my opinion, I don't think that they listened to the financial aid community as much as they could have, and they really thought that they could continue on with the aggressive revamping that they wanted to do, and obviously they experienced a lot of challenges and hiccups through the process.

Frank Arce, assistant dean of admissions and financial aid, in an online Usable Knowledge story about the troubled rollout of the FAFSA last year

The ABCs

How — and Why — Gutman Just Keeps Getting Better

ILLUSTRATION BY **MARTIN GEE**

A.

Food Pantry!

The Office of Student Affairs, now located on the second floor of Gutman (along with Career Services and Alumni Engagement), opened Crimson Cupboard, a food pantry stocked with shelf-stable items for any Ed School student facing food insecurity.

B.

Inspiration!

The walls have been transformed! Throughout the first-floor hallways, there are posters of scenes from around Harvard, and running up and down the staircases there are huge photo collages of students, staff, faculty, and campus life at the Ed School, with inspirational sayings like "This is your moment" and "You're here for a reason."

C.

Borrowed!

The second floor lobby is the place to be — and borrow. At the top of the stairs is a cute little "freedom-to-read" mini box filled with banned books that can be checked out. Displayed in nearby glass cases like treasures from a museum are helpful tech gadgets that can be borrowed, including a Canon DSLR camera, a light therapy lamp, laptop stands, and whiteboard kits.

D.

Fun!

Stop by the back room of the cafe every Thursday at 5 p.m. and you'll find not only students, but also giant popcorn buckets, puzzle pieces spread across tables, a corn hole match in progress, and a ping pong table in place of lunch tables. HGSE Hangouts is a way to bring students together to relax and share good conversation.

E.

Doing Good!

During the last week of September, faculty members held a "read-in for banned books." Each day at 3:30 p.m., a different faculty read a banned book out loud in Gutman's lobby. Books were chosen from the collection of the Jeanne Chall Reading Lab.

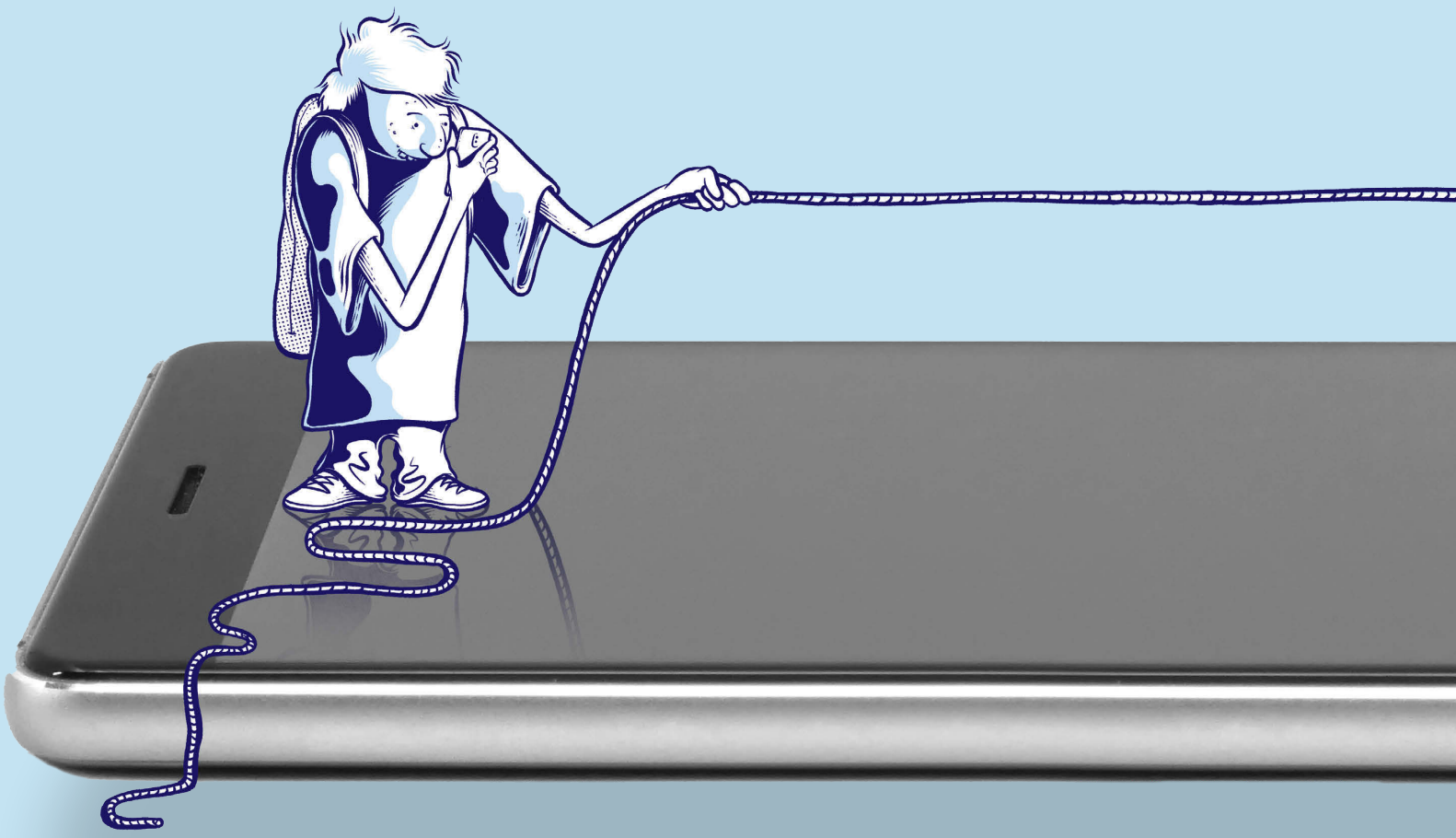
THE MOMENT

IT WAS A WHOLE VIBE ON APPIAN WAY IN AUGUST AT THIS YEAR'S ORIENTATION WITH STUDENTS FROM THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION PROGRAM.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JILL ANDERSON

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

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage PAID
Burlington, VT
Permit No. 19



“I noticed I was participating more and engaging more in the classes I was taking. Even though I love using my phone, it’s not something I need during the school day.”

CRISTO REY JESUIT SEATTLE HIGH SCHOOL’S SOPHIA J.
(SEE PAGE 40)