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POSTSCWRIP

Courage to Reflect by Camille Kavon ('07)



After a difficult spring, I immersed myself in three traditionally face-to-face writing project programs that moved online due to the pandemic. The usual challenges of presentation and virtual accommodations were evident, but so was the urgency of a conversation on the topics of equity and social justice within the programs. At summer's end, I continued to reflect, and wondered if our site was making this work evident or explicit in the creation of programs. I was overwhelmed with these ideas and how to understand the repercussions of the events of the summer and what it might mean for my practice as an educator. I wanted so much to make a difference, to isolate how I would be a social justice warrior within the Writing Project and what that meant.

What I didn't recognize and give space to was the idea that I needed to lay a foundation for the topics of equity and social justice and it needed to be apparent in even the fundamental steps of any Writing Project program. But how could I ask for evidence of equity and the promotion of social justice when the classroom dynamics had undertaken such drastic changes? Moving programs to a virtual space prompted this thinking: what fundamental components of a traditional writing camp were evident, and what components needed to be analyzed and perhaps even changed? In a traditional writing camp, we meet with students in a physical space. Even to acknowledge this summer's writing camp as non-traditional was difficult for me. But it was—non-traditional and challenging in new ways. Within the physical space, teachers are able to read the room and respond to students. In the virtual classroom, students and teachers alike are navigating unknown territory, and if a structure for equity and social justice has not been developed, how can I expect it to emerge in the setting of a writing camp *or* my classroom?

I love teaching every summer at *Young Writers Camp*. I see it as an extension of my own classroom, a place to try new ideas, to work that writing muscle and promote a love for the written word. When we are in a physical classroom, even for a short space of time, a writing community develops, and we always recognize how important it is to listen and be heard in a safe space. Because of this, *Young Writers Camp* has always been a place of developing and continuing conversations. When a student shares the frustration of writer's block, it is an interesting exercise in conversation to help them get back on track and find their voice. I love this part of writers' camp. I would observe something about the student to spark a question and get a conversation flowing that I could navigate towards a connection or an idea for a writing piece. I always assumed students wanted to be heard. When someone takes notice, we feel valued. Or at least, this is what I felt before Zoom.

Introducing James: I never saw James. For the two-week duration of *Young Writers Camp*, I saw his name on his Zoom square, and above it, a picture of the singer Rick Astley. Amused, I once asked the significance. "Just saw it on Reddit," he said. That's it. Nothing else. If I could have seen his face, I like to think I could have continued the conversation and asked what Rick Astley was doing on a Reddit thread. (I know now it has something to do with a phenomenon called a *Rickroll* and has been dubbed one of the greatest memes in history.)

How has the pandemic affected their space and our reactions to their behavior in this space?

James seemed intent on staying hidden. He did not want me to notice or ask anything about his writing pieces or what interested him. He existed in a space on Zoom, and I was frustrated. I began to wonder why he attended. He was on time every day, on the dot. But he was also the first person to leave at the top of the hour, and he said "pass" every time we shared. One day, I didn't call on him. I thought I was being an observant teacher who allowed a student some space. As we ended the sharing session, he asked, "What about me?" I was startled and elated. I made up the excuse that Zoom squares were moving and I hadn't seen him as they recalibrated.

"James, would you like to share your golden line?"

"No," he said, "I pass."

Why did this happen? Why did James attend camp? If he had attended an in-person session of camp, how would we have responded to this situation? And what might this mean? What were the implications for my practice? What kinds of space are students seeking? How has the pandemic affected their space and our reactions to their behavior in this space?

I have no idea if James attended the camp of his own accord or if he was pressed into attending by his parents. Whatever the reason, he was there. I had no idea what was

happening on the other side of the screen. No idea what kinds of events prompt students to behave in a certain fashion. I'm guessing there was a reason James kept the video camera off. Did he feel intimidated by the other students and the surroundings visible in the cameras? Was he concerned about noise filtering through the meeting? On one occasion, James did unmute long enough to say his "pass" and in the background was a loud rumble of words. Was James dealing with noises in his surroundings that affected his desire to participate in the class?



I would like to think that if we were in a physical classroom, I would have a conversation with James and develop a rapport. I am a questioner. I deal with unusual incidents and thoughts by stringing together questions that help me deal with the encounters and parse out solutions. In this case, the questions just kept on coming and I couldn't answer any of them. I kept listing the questions as I thought about the situation. I couldn't make any more guesses about James and I didn't want to. I could, however, gather my thoughts and make some sense of what I would do with this information when I entered the virtual classroom in the fall.

I tried to maintain my composure and treated the students as if they were in the physical space. This was my mistake. They were *not* in a physical space.

I started with my own reaction. At first, I was nonchalant. I was trying to keep the class moving, but I was also very cautious to not scare anyone away by intense reactions. I felt the students were skittish at first and I was nervous too, not knowing what to expect. I tried to maintain my composure and treated the students as if they were in the physical

space. This was my mistake. They were *not* in a physical space. They were in a virtual space not of their making and there were no rules or standards that fit our expectations of a writing camp. I wanted to be welcoming and pleasant. We had gone through so much in the last few months and every student had a little look of trauma about them. Or maybe it was just me—I was traumatized, and I projected the idea that I needed to treat them as students who had made it through a traumatizing experience.

My interpretation of the situation was to immediately think something was *wrong*, a standard reaction and one I view now as being too simplified. There was nothing wrong with James. The only thing wrong was me thinking that something was wrong with James and it needed to be addressed. But did it? What was wrong with James staying quiet and

listening to his fellow writers? I started picturing James in a physical classroom. Perhaps he would be the one student that sat in the back of the room with his hood up and his eyes lowered. He never caused any problems but neither did he react or participate. I would probably spend the school session thinking about reaching James and in the process lose sight of other students that needed my attention. I'd like to think that as a super teacher, I could eventually reach James. But in reality, a number of Jameses have walked out of my classroom—I will never know if any of the classroom content mattered to them, and I will always suspect I didn't do enough to reach them.

This is where the groundwork starts. If we are to talk about bringing social justice and equity into the writing project programs and ultimately our classrooms, we need to start with the very basic of relationships that exist between the student and the teacher. Promoting equity in any situation means meeting the students where they are when they enter the classroom, whether it is a virtual or physical space. Dynamics have changed and demand that our relationships evolve as well. I cannot address the idea of equity and social justice until I address the relationship between learner and teacher in this virtual environment. Equity is not just equitable treatment, but the idea of meeting students where they are and supporting their growth with a variety of strategies.

Upon being thrust into the virtual environment with no warning, we expected students to conform to the expectations we had established in the physical classroom, but we need to be flexible and recognize students are entering a virtual classroom within their own physical domain. Equity demands we meet them where they are and provide them with the support they need at that moment. Social justice demands we offer them our best, regardless of their opportunities and privileges within society. Virtual classrooms have leveled the playing field in some respects, but also decimated any kind of playing field for so many of our most vulnerable students that couldn't even begin to think about attending a *Young Writers Camp* in the middle of a pandemic.

The implications for my practice are broad—from developing relationships, to the idea that I must reflect on grading practices and remove implicit bias that unconsciously plants itself in my grading protocol. How I arrived at this final statement after reflecting upon a critical incident in *Young Writers Camp* shows how important it is for educators to constantly reflect on incidents that may influence beliefs and practices within the realm of equity and social justice. Having the courage to do so is a topic for another day.



From the Editor Cynthia Carbone Ward ('01)



Recently I did some learning in a remote place: a rocky ridge in the backcountry. My 7-year old buddy Virginia went with me, and her lovely grandmother Jo. Neither of them had ever been to this particular spot, which I refer to as the sandstone pools when rain fills its concavities, and the rest of the time, as church. Wind and weather have sculpted the rocks, leaving them swirled and hollowed and rounded into tantalizing shapes, and a sheltered arched recess and circular ledge convey a sense of embrace. It's impossible not to imagine that those who were here long before us did not pause in this place for refreshment and reflection.

It's a high point, and the view is long: in one direction the eye meets a progression of hills dense with coastal chaparral and inscribed with the occasional zig-zag lines of a sandy road, in the other, to the sea, and to Santa Rosa Island on the distant horizon. But today is deliciously foggy, and we don't see the ocean, just white sky that is sometimes luminous, stretched taut against pale sunlight, making all the colors glow. Some of the rocks are gorgeously splattered with red and green lichen.

It's a special treat to have Virginia with us. She never loses her sense of wonder, and she knows instinctively that this is a magic place. We sip tea with milk and honey in tiny china cups, and eat tangerines and butter cookies, and we know that we will never forget being here together on this hushed morning. It's like climbing into a secret, and what can we do with the occasion, other than gratefully acknowledge it, and enjoy its sweetness?

I've been up here with other people over the decades, and sometimes we stand and look out toward the sea and send our wishes and hopes, prayer-like, into the universe, along with our thanks and our promises, and whatever else we want to say. (It's a custom started by my friend Ming, who calls it "postcards to the universe".) Virginia gets into the spirit of it right away, and her postcard is a loving one, starting with a wish for the pandemic to end. But despite the pandemic and the woes of the world, the three of us feel happy in this moment.

Virginia is a fine tour guide, pointing out the animal shape of a distant tree, a tunnel in a wind-carved rock, the silvery moss on branches. She notices things, and we try to take pictures with our cell phones, but they never seem sufficient. "My eyes are my camera," says Virginia, wise and unencumbered. I learn so much from her.

Speaking of cell phones, at that incongruous moment, mine rings. Who knew there was a spot beside that sacred stone basin with cell service? Apparently, the pharmacy is calling, for some unknown reason. I ignore it until it goes away.

"It could at least have been a real phone call from someone special," I mutter.

“Yeah,” says Virginia, “like your great-great-grandfather letting you know he received the postcard you just sent.”

Could there be a more delightful response? My 7-year-old buddy has reminded me that we are composed of stories, after all.

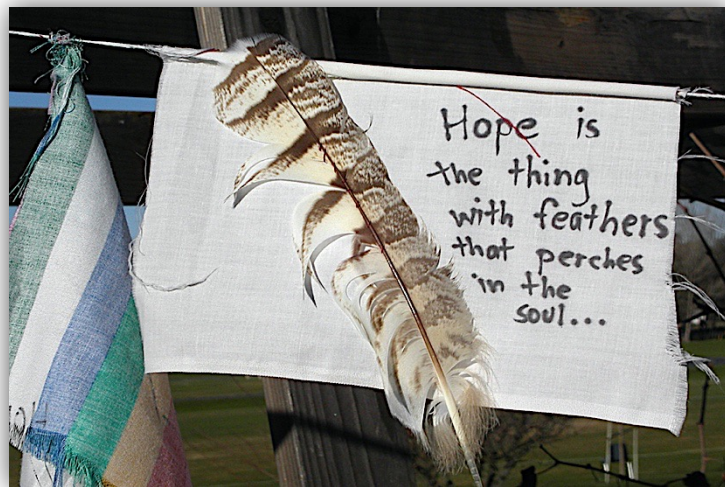
And as I walk along with this precious child, my thoughts turn, as they often do, to teaching and learning, and it occurs to me that we are in the midst of an ongoing opportunity to demonstrate to the kids some of the most important, formative lessons of their lives, lessons that will shape them forever. We can show how resilient and creative we are as we navigate this pandemic, and how we reimagine and rebuild our social and political landscapes after brokenness. We can see more clearly than ever that kindness and community are crucial, and that our networks are wide and interconnected. We have the chance to demonstrate that people *can* rise up in the midst of sorrow and strife and mightily turn our paths in the direction of reason and decency.

I feel certain that we can do this. What better lesson to teach our children than that we have the power and the will to uphold our ideals, to heal and work together? What better postcard to the universe?

This edition of PostSCWriP reflects abundant effort, honesty, and love, and we are grateful to those who shared their writing. Camille Kavon explores difficult questions on reaching all students within the pandemic-wrought constraints. Diane Siegal takes readers on a pilgrim’s hike through a California landscape and her childhood days, unearthing epiphanies and treasures, real as rock. Intrepid teacher Mark Olsen finds creative opportunity in even the most challenging of times, and John Isaacson faces some hard truths with candor, guts and resolve. Lori Campbell’s in-depth article on distance learning offers a wealth of tangible advice and encouragement. “We now fully understand that the lives of our students are more important than just their knowledge of content,” Lori writes, and it just might be that distance learning has been exactly what we needed to see that. There’s a little bit of levity too, thanks to Erika Cobain’s litany à la Billy Collins, and an enticing sample of John Isaacson’s Covid diary comic strips.

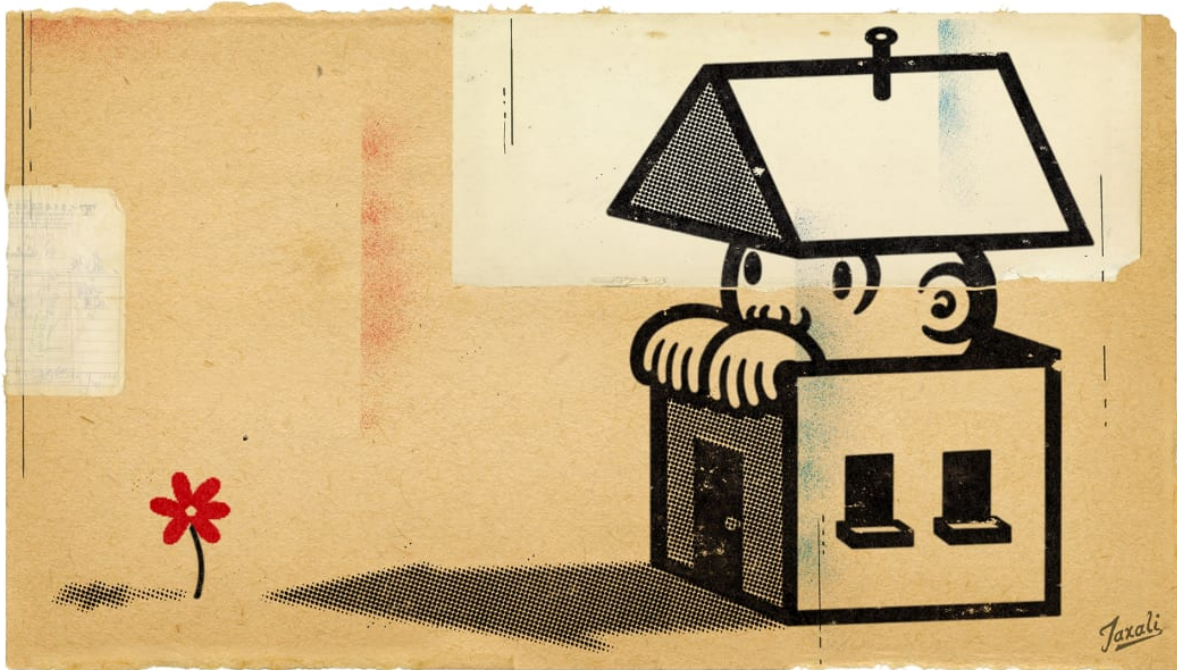
Readers will find deep soul searching herein, advice about teaching and learning in this time of great change, and musings on the things that matter now even more than we knew.

You know what? I’m starting to feel it—that funny, familiar fluttering inside...yeah, the feathered thing.



Director's Message by Tim Dewar

What a year.



About twelve months ago, I left my office at UCSB, doing my part “to flatten the curve.” I brought home files, and books. I undertook Emergency Remote Teaching, even as I heard of others baking sourdough, binging on Netflix, and reading the classics to fill the hours. I knew so little then.

Through the summer and fall, I made plans and revised them as public health demanded. I worried and fretted about my children, my students, and my colleagues. As winter and the holidays arrived, I watched as the numbers climbed and the disease circled like a shark.

Two days ago, my parents, 90-years-old and in declining health, got their second vaccine shots. “Taking the band-aid off was the most painful part,” my mom told me. Yesterday, my wife got her first, and today, I did, too. It feels like one thing is about to end, and another about to begin.

But I don't know what either of those things is. Over the past year, I mostly existed in a fugue state. I *must* have done things—you know, taught classes, graded papers, answered emails—but I have little recollection of the past twelve months. I was disassociated from the present. Living in some never-never time.

Now it's spring again. The hills around us are greening nicely; the days are lengthening. Another spring break approaches, and I have a sense of normal/normality/normalcy returning, and yet of everything being different/new/strange.

But I have a stronger desire to throw off that blanket judgment of myself, or for that matter, judgment of *any* of us. I want instead to grasp the enormity of what 7.8 billion people have experienced.

When I reflect on the year, regrets, both serious and silly, tug at me. Did I miss my chance to read all those teacher books from conferences I've hauled home and never read? Will I never get to watch *Tiger King* or *My Octopus Teacher* or *Bridgerton*? Was I a good enough parent to my remote-schooled children? Should I have...well, I suspect each of us has many ways to finish that sentence.

But I have a stronger desire to throw off that blanket judgment of myself, or for that matter, judgment of *any* of us. I want instead to grasp the enormity of what

7.8 billion people have experienced. Roughly a year ago, the world stopped, changed for everyone. Even those who continued stocking shelves, caring for patients, teaching students, did so knowing that everything around them had changed. There was much unknown in the past, present, and future.

As I struggle to make sense of this moment in history, I keep returning to the most basic fact: I survived. A year ago, that wasn't a given. And many didn't. Over 2.6 million worldwide, over 530,000 in the U.S., over 55,000 in California, and countless relatives of friends died. I don't want to take credit for surviving—I know that was due to luck and privilege—but I do want that to be enough. When the stories of the COVID-19 pandemic are told, I don't want to hear braggadocio or one-upmanship. I want us to be able to put aside the competition that permeates so much of our culture. There was no “#winning” the pandemic. There was surviving. If you're reading this, then you “won.” We survived a pandemic.

When I left my campus office a year ago, I set up a workspace in my garage. I cleared off an old Formica table that had belonged to my maternal grandparents. I remember sitting at that table with them as they shared countless cups of coffee. While it might technically be an antique, it is not anything special. I'd be lucky if it fetched ten dollars at a garage sale. But it does connect me to my ancestors, a Midwestern couple who raised three kids, moved to California after the war, and before those adventures, survived our country's previous pandemic. All those times we sat at this table, with them, and they never mentioned it.

I'm guessing by the time a grandson came along, those years were just history. I look forward to a time when the past twelve months are the same.

[Illustration by Canadian artist Gary Taxali]

Sticks and Stones Built My Bones

by Diane Siegal ('09)



Where I live in California, rain transforms the parched hills and mesas into fairy glades almost overnight. It washes away months of accumulated dust, brings forth riotous life, and suppresses the furious fire season. It's a sort of deity to us. Lichen-coated oak twigs are scattered about after a downpour and the stream pools fill. The dirt here has distinct seasonal scents: cinnamon-y when dry and umami when damp. When the clouds are grey and heavy and the skies open for the great renewal, my dog and I head out for a hike. He has a thick pelt and a sense of adventure, so the cool wet thrills him. I have a good pair of boots, a real raincoat, and a pilgrim's reverence for certain trees and stones, so it thrills me too.

Yesterday, while out meandering in a creek bed and steadying myself from the most recent political spectacle, I heard children's voices calling down to me from on high. Looking far up, I saw two small boys on the ridgetop, waving their arms and yelling toward me. I knew they were playing at something, and I assumed they were up to minor mischief. I know I would have been at their age.

When I was about twelve, as I guessed they were, my miscreant friends and I liked to fashion a dummy out of old pantyhose and place it in the street as a car approached. Pulling on its attached string, we'd make the doll twitch just as the car neared, hoping to get the drivers to stop. If we succeeded in our nasty little endeavor, the driver was furious as we tore off into the bushes, laughing. We took pleasure in this. I don't not know why, and I'm not proud of rotten little me. It's just the sort of thing we did recreationally because we were unregulated, uncivilized and maybe not from the best families.

Now, almost one year into the pandemic quarantine, parents can't be blamed for sending their unsupervised children outside to play, as my parents always did. Everyone's going a little nuts, so what's a slight jape at the expense of an old lady in a battered sunhat? I casually assumed the same prankishness from these kids. As I trudged past below them, the boys kept clamoring until finally the wind carried their voices to me and I heard: "I love you! I hope this gets better soon."

This startled me out of all my corrupt assumptions. They probably heard encouragements like this at home, so unlike what I'd heard. Their little blessing was heart-felt and as fresh as the grass shoots. I waved my arms back at them like a roadside Tube Man and hollered, "I love you, too."

A few weeks before this, during the still-parched summer, I was on a mundane exercise walk along a dirt track with the same canine companion. The walk by the old Mission is lovely at certain times of year, but during the summer it's strictly dry gulch. The squirrels and gophers like it, though, so I have to keep my eyes on the road ahead to avoid stumbles in their holes. Sometimes it's nice just pay attention to how well my feet carry me. I'm not taking anything for granted these days.

I think I was the lucky seeker whose eyes were in the right place to catch the blessing that day.

There, on that day, in the dirt track, I found a soft-edged grey stone about the size of teaspoon with a silver smiley face drawn on it. I picked it up, as any pilgrim would, knowing it was a token from someone to cheer me. I want to clarify that I don't actually think it was meant for me; I think I was the lucky seeker whose eyes were in the right place to catch the blessing that day. I've heard that the Chinese character for luck is a blend of two kanjis, one for opportunity and the other for awareness. I'm that kind of lucky.

I often muse on the smiley stone, which sits in a place of honor on my kitchen windowsill now. I'll pass it on soon since I want to keep the vibe going (and the windowsill is prime real estate), but the stone nudges my imagination. I have pictured the smiley-face maker as a ten-year old girl whose long hair is wavy, flowing, and a bit coarse. It needs brushing, but it's so shiny. She's gangly, sun-burnable, and wearing shorts from Target. Probably home-schooled, but so is everyone nowadays. Anyway, she's sweet-hearted, obedient, trusting and responsible. If she has a guinea pig, you can bet his cage is clean.

While washing dishes and considering the little rock, which is now my amulet to use as I wish, I tried to imagine the artist as a boy. Whenever I tried to think of *him*, it just didn't generate the same compelling narrative. I can see a boy's face, but he's not real to me the way she is. Why is she so immediately and indelibly female in my mind? Would I have been able to imagine those sweet ridgetop boys as *boys* if I didn't already know, indisputably, that they were? Did I give the rock artist a girl's identity because she's a mysterious part of me? Was I ever a sweet-hearted and trusting girl? Or was I born as mischievous and wily as my dog? Did I become sly only because I stumbled into it and no one was around to pick me up and say, "I love you. I hope this gets better soon."

It's long past the expiration date for lamenting the shortcomings of my childhood. I now understand that my parents were decent enough. They just didn't know how to be soft grey stones with smiling faces. They were sharp-edged people and their good intentions

were alloyed with the turbid currents their past. Still, there was something brilliant and precious locked inside each of them. Neither had ever had loving hands or cool water run over them to soften their edges, so they were hard and brittle in their dealings with the world. Their love was austere, though not all bad. I have found many times in life that being a little flinty has its uses, but I just don't need to be like that very much anymore. Rather, I'm liking my rounder sides as I prepare, one day, to become sweet cinnamon dust.

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The recent blessing from these unknown children, and the many children I have known and loved from my years as a teacher, have given me a re-do for my own crap childhood. I get to be a curious old lady, trekking around the manzanita and sagebrush, marveling at the red tails and red buds. I've not lost all my sass, but I am morphing into a wonder-struck young explorer. In so many ways, I've always been on this pilgrimage. It has led me to the very streambed in which I rock-hop today, and which will take me home directly when it's time.

Da Capo

Take the used-up heart like a pebble
and throw it far out.

Soon there is nothing left.
Soon the last ripple exhausts itself
in the weeds.

Returning home, slice carrots, onions,
celery.
Glaze them in oil before adding
the lentils, water, and herbs.

Then the roasted chestnuts, a little pepper,
the salt.
Finish with goat cheese and parsley. Eat.

You may do this, I tell you, it is permitted.
Begin again the story of your life.

— Jane Hirshfield



Reimagining Our World with Lessons Learned from COVID

Mark Olsen ('11)

March 17th, 2020 will be forever etched in my mind, and not just because it's my daughter's birthday and St. Patrick's Day. Still written on the whiteboard in my classroom, it is the last date I was in my room with my students. Months later, I returned to see how things were, and it looked like a ghost town where everyone had gotten up and run out on a moment's notice, similar to the inhabitants of Pompeii fleeing the eruption of



Vesuvius. Hanging on the walls were posters of my students' work on *Animal Farm* propaganda, along with abandoned textbooks, notebooks, pens, and pencils.

That night, Kern County became the last county in California to shutter its classroom doors. The entire 4th quarter was spent at home, zooming my students once a week, and doing drive-by parades to build morale. Expectations were low and "do no harm" was the mantra. Grades were turned into pass/fail, and every effort was made to get students to complete missing work. It worked, to some extent, and many appreciated the time to breathe and ponder critical aspects of life. Family time increased dramatically, popular pastimes shut down almost completely, and a forced "fast," or refrain from normal activity began and still continues today in many ways. Church, travel, sports, athletics, and much more simply stopped. The overscheduled frenzied week, where we would fill our white board calendar with our four kids' daily schedules, became uncomfortably silent and blank, similar to my classroom. No pole vaulting, band concerts, flag football, soccer, school play (where I had a lead part in *Beauty and the Beast*) or church activities occurred, nor have they happened in significant ways for the ten months and counting since.

Was all this worth it? Yes, I hope! Critical lessons continue to impact us, thanks to COVID-19, although it's hard to explain the pandemic while we still live in the middle of it. A completely different routine continues to dominate my life, and I often wonder what consequences will come after spending all this time off doing these activities and being online with everything else. I love walking by my children's rooms seeing them engaged in their classes and checking to see how they're doing; at the same time, I cringe when they're in their pajamas, playing video games after 15 minutes of instruction, taking showers during class, eating a late breakfast, and curled up on their bed, amongst a number of other activities. Many benefits arise from our current lifestyle—a more relaxed

schedule, simpler life, convenient zoom meetings to discuss work and such, and moments of critical thinking and creativity, which help us meet the complex challenges we face.

It's crazy to realize I've not missed one day of school for being sick or attending a professional development conference. A good thing for my students, right? I've thrived amidst this chaotic time in many ways, drawing upon my best qualities. One such attribute is demonstrating a positive outlook on life--a gift of my sweet mother's influence on me resulting from how she handled living with multiple sclerosis for 44 years and being a widowed mother of ten children for over 35 years. We give up too easily sometimes, forgetting we know more than what we believe we do. "We've got this!" I tell my students.

"What good amid these, O me, O life!" to quote our great poet counselor Walt Whitman.

"Answer: That you are here--that life exists and identity, that the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse."

What a powerful message this poem conveys over 150 years later about the travails and purposes of life!

A wonderful colleague commented that we're all first-year teachers this year, and I have found this to be true. My actual first year of teaching began as a substitute teacher in the Anchorage Alaska school district after I turned down an offer to teach in a small rural Yu'pik Eskimo village called Eek, 500 miles off the Bering Strait. I thought, "Who in their right mind would teach in the middle of the frozen tundra?"



After two months of substituting, a rewarding but still unfulfilling experience, I meekly called them back asking if the offer was still available. Yes, it was (indicative of the challenge of filling such positions), and with a much more grateful and appreciative expression for the offer, I accepted and began one of the most enriching experiences of my life. Temperatures that winter reached -75 degrees Fahrenheit (with windchill factor) and a language and culture very foreign to me made me feel even greener as a teacher.

Still, it would be considered easier than teaching online right now! Everyone seems angry, tired, and a bit lethargic. Our country fights with itself over politics, overreacting and quick to condemn at almost every opportunity. Parents expect more for their children, understandably so. Students like and dislike online

learning, and teachers complain of the constant stress we feel. The future seems uncertain, at best. Yet, I do not doubt the best is yet to come. Where? How?

This past semester, my final exams consisted of three parts, which is similar to what I assign for a normal final: 1) performances of plays or poems; 2) an essay; 3) an online exam on the reading. It was tough! We worked hard completing them, but the feeling at the end satisfied me. It indicated we could do hard things in hard times. To perform their scenes from the plays, many groups prerecorded themselves doing so, and it worked well, incorporating virtual backgrounds, sound effects, and even the positioning of their zoom videos on the screen. It was so cool to see what they came up with when needed! Their performances also brought joy to my student teacher who laughed watching sophomores act scenes such as Pyramus and Thisbe's death lamentation, even joining one group who needed an extra person. It was a fun and powerful way to excel during a challenging situation.

Our lives have been bound in a nutshell this past year and our imagination has made us king of this infinite online space.

Completing such activities requires a strong class culture, particularly during this distance learning experience. I made it clear from the beginning I have high expectations of everyone and will provide high support to help each student meet them. To establish a positive atmosphere and attitude towards our zoom meetings each day, I play "walk in" music via Pandora. My favorite stations include Classics for Kids,

Guardians of the Galaxy, Hipster Cocktail Party, and Hamilton the Musical. Often, the vibe this brings energizes me and provides an inviting environment. Following tried and true Writing Project strategies, we begin each class *Writing Into the Day* on popular topics, quotes, videos, current events, and other such prompts. One student commented in her journal how much she appreciates these morning writes, comparing it to getting her daily cup of coffee. Each Friday we write a poem, usually copying the style of a famous poet. Imitating poems by Gwendolyn Brooks, William Carlos Williams, Pablo Neruda, Quincy Troupe, Tupac Shakur, Carl Sandberg and many other poets uplifts the soul! We've created quite a collection and plan to showcase them at the end of the year.

In the play my senior students read this year, Hamlet told his friends, "I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself king of infinite space..." Our lives have been bounded in a nutshell this past year and our imagination has made us king of this infinite online space. A number of years ago, the [Harvard Medical School](#) conducted a study about imagination. The experiment included measuring the brains of musicians playing music and imagining playing music. The results demonstrated that our brain does not know the difference between imagination and reality. This relates as well to other similar mental trainings, like practice swings of a golf club, that can actually change the physical structure of the brain. I shared this with my students the first day of school, promising them if we put our whole heart and mind into the work, we will thrive and succeed in the

midst of this sheltering-in-place situation. I've personally found this to be the case and believe my students have as well. We must tap into our imaginative spirit each day.

All this is a work in progress. Many days, I stare at a black screen of names. One time, after asking if anyone was listening, I played Pink Floyd's 9 minute 40 second piece "Is There Anybody Out There?" commenting that this is what I felt. They appreciated this. When it gets unbearable, I create group assignments and projects to help students collaborate and engage in the class—with an in-class debate tournament along with a graduation speech planned this semester. They often do great work, working through the technical difficulties and awkwardness of zoom presentations, and inspire me with their efforts.

This generation must face the challenge with full force, holding nothing back, for nothing less will suffice. I stand in awe of the trials our young students face today.

Ralph Waldo Emerson in his Harvard address "American Scholar" explained, "Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding." This generation must face this challenge with full force, holding nothing back, for nothing less will suffice. I stand in awe of the trials our young students face today: How in the world will they overcome them? One step at a time. We each share in this burden and will succeed and fail together.

Often, I will show what's going on in the news so we can think, write, and share what we are feeling. When Amanda Gorman gave her beautiful Inaugural poetry reading, we watched it live, in awe of this unforgettable, historical moment. When the Capitol building was stormed by a mob, we watched in horror. The world keeps turning, and we cannot shirk or hide from this moment; indeed, it is our time to shine and embrace it.

I look forward to teaching with a new purpose, reinventing the classroom into a more meaningful experience. Ralph Waldo Emerson commented, "That which we persist in doing becomes easier to do, not that the nature of the thing has changed but that our power to do has increased." We've endured this hard time and our capacity at handling it continues to grow. We will achieve even higher feats as we come out of this dystopian world with a fresh perspective and appreciation for what we have and want. We must do so, however, with more humility, gratitude, and commitment. Let's take this resolve and resolve even more challenges and problems before us. We have miles to go before we can rest, but the cause for education never has been greater. We have much to give, learn, and receive. Life now provides wonderful purpose and value. May we embrace this world together, reimagining it better than ever before!

Litany for Corona by Erika Cobain ('13)

Inspired by Billy Collins

You are the toilet paper and the scythe,
the hand sanitizer and the time.
You are the distance between the shoppers
and you are the line - - - - -
as it snakes beyond Bed, Bath and Beyond.
Suddenly,
this task is not so urgent or important.

However, you are not the “my coworker memes,”
the long walk in the morning,
or the rain collecting on the end of maple leaves,
and you are certainly not real happy hours,
there is just no way you are real happy hours,
or one-year-old kids’ birthday parties.

It is possible that you are a collapsing sand berm,
maybe even the toy doctor’s kit in my son’s room,
but you are not even close
to being the stacked rocks, rolled by the tide.

And a quick look in the mirror will show
you are neither the hairstylist I used to visit
nor the one-hour foot massage.

It might interest you to know
speaking of the plentiful imagery of the world,
that I am the sound of synchronous howling at 8pm on weekends.

I also happen to be the box of vegetables from the CSA,
the kindness of strangers, neighbors and friends,
and the bright yellow slide propped against my fence.

I am the trampoline in Elizabeth’s yard
and the recipe for Chocolate Crazy Cake.
But don’t worry, I’m not the toilet paper and the scythe.
You are still the toilet paper and the scythe.
You will always be the toilet paper and the scythe,
not to mention, the hand sanitizer and —somehow—the time.

SCWriP Writes



Eddi Lynn Christensen ('04) retired from Ventura College last June after a 34-year teaching career, during which she taught pretty much every level from Kindergarten through college. A published poet, she decided to take on a post-retirement project with SCWriP: facilitating a writing group.

"I felt like my job was to be available, to encourage the Fellows, remind them of deadlines, put them in groups where they could get as much feedback as possible on their work, and set meetings," she explains. "I followed the SCWriP formula, with lots of

writing time, and lots of sharing time. We also did forum analysis—to get some inspiration and an idea of what our audiences might look like—and we set goals for ourselves as writers. This group was formed with an eye to publication."

Eddi admits that she was nervous at first, but when she expressed this anxiety to Tim, he said, "Don't worry, these are FELLOWS." Indeed, she was amazed—at the work she saw coming out of these teacher/writers, at the respect and encouragement they offered one another, and by their passion for teaching.

Funny thing: it turns out that everyone loved having a deadline. It gave the needed nudge. And the group itself offered a wonderful sense of community and support. By the end, the experience had been so positive that group participants have asked to work together again, aiming at future publication opportunities. Several pieces in this edition of PostSCWriP are direct results of the group's work: Lori Campbell's, Mark Olsen's, Erika Cobain's, and John Isaacson's.

POEM by Barry Spacks

Will it come again like this?
Will we ever get it right?
It is always as it is,
And it passes.

Never as it was,
Yet always somehow bright,
Always somehow sweet
In its changes.

We will never get it right.
It will come, but not like this.
It is always as it is,
And it changes.



An Honest (and Uncomfortable) Dispatch by John Isaacson ('16)

At the end of the 2019-2020 school year, our boarding school faculty and staff sat socially distanced in the pole barn and took turns articulating our separate journeys in relationship to race and privilege.

My journey began here at this school, where my father was a student before me, when it was an all-boys school. As a cisgender straight white male legacy, I am ensconced in privilege. I was also a member of an in-group: my closest friends and classmates had not only grown up at the school, but our fathers had attended the school when it was an all-boys school. Privilege reaches backwards through time as well as forwards, guaranteeing connections and relationships that not only form a lifelong social and financial support structure, but reach down through generations.

It was not until I entered college that I began to understand I had been steeped in privilege. After graduating, I briefly returned to Midland to teach an evening elective once a week in contemporary world poetry: I was eager to teach what I now knew had been absent from my own high school education: Octavio Paz, Adrienne Rich, Wisława Szymborska.

I find that stepping onto the side of justice involves not only looking in the mirror, but looking in the past, reflecting on the years of unfair advantages I have taken.

In four short years while I was in college, the student body had grown noticeably more diverse. I met the new director of admissions, an African American woman, Angela, and I remember congratulating her on her work and her pride in the difference she had made. Angela and I remained in touch over the years, when we both relocated to the Bay Area.

Substitute teaching in the Bay Area opened my eyes to the inequities in our national education system. Some classes were understaffed, and I had no experience or training. My boarding school experience seemed irrelevant to my students' experience.

One thing was clear to me: My students were not receiving the same education I had received at Midland. The inequity in our public-school system was stark before my eyes. It was not a great leap to connect this to inequality in our economy and our political system.

In the year 2000, I was 24, and I worked as a poet-in-residence at Lowell Middle School in West Oakland, where I was hired by a guidance counselor who was in charge of some funding. Although the school was predominantly African American, the counselor was white, and he knew my housemate, who was also white and had taught at Lowell through Teach For America. Not only this, but the counselor had requested to work with me, rather than an older, wiser, more skilled and experienced poet and storyteller from the area who had applied for the job with me. Privilege was clearly at play, once again.

Looking back on this story, I feel guilt, shame, and embarrassment. At the time, I had just barely moved out of my parents' house. I probably needed the money to pay rent, but this was still no excuse to take the job. What I did was unethical: I acted selfishly and I benefited financially from my privilege, although it is hard to say which privilege I was benefitting from: Was it the fact that I'm white, or the fact that I'm male (like the guidance counselor), or that I was young and in the peer group of my housemate who worked at the school one year before?



Got privilege?

It bears mentioning here that in the years to come, West Oakland would face significant gentrification issues. I can still remember a line of poetry from the Oakland artist, Marcel Diallo (and I may be misquoting him): "First come the punks and the artists / they are the tip of the arrow the pierces deepest"

I hope it is clear that I am not trying to flaunt my privilege. I am trying to acknowledge that it exists, that part of what I have achieved in my life, is not due to my personal merits, but simply due to the body I was born into. I am trying to extinguish a false superiority and face my unearned privilege which comes at such an expense. I am trying to learn how I can even begin to pay back a debt that I owe. As Nick tells Jay Gatsby, "You can't change the past" but perhaps moving forward I can be more aware of how my privilege impacts my students, my family, and my colleagues.

I do not feel proud to tell this story.

But as I abandon my pride, I hope my students, my colleagues, will feel a little more comfortable in conversing about how privilege plays a role in our lives, our relationships, at our school, and in our country.

I am trying to be honest and confront my own privilege, and in hopes of showing you that it is okay if you want to confront it with me too. I'm not asking you to. But if you want to, I encourage you.

In his TedX talk, from 2011, titled, "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Discussing Race" Jay Smooth compares racism to having something stuck in your teeth. Please let me know if I have something stuck in my teeth.

He goes on to make the point that "because there are so many disparities on the various sides of the color lines in this country... it is worthwhile for us to iron out these conversational issues... so that we can get a little bit closer to working together on those big issues."

Historical events, like the invasion of the Capitol in January, can be connected to these big issues.

The historian Ibrahim X. Kendi did this as he was being interviewed on National Public Radio in the wake of these attacks. The interviewer asked Dr. Kendi for his thoughts on the idea that America was somehow “devolving into chaos.”

Kendi replied that this idea is, “ahistorical” meaning that the idea that our country is devolving into chaos “lack[s] historical perspective or context” (Google)

He states, “To read American history... is to remember coup attempt after coup attempt whether political or economic.” He goes on to point out examples from Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Reconstruction era, the Civil War, and recently at state capitals.

Referring to an article he recently wrote for *The Atlantic*, he adds, “historically, America has had two forces: the force of justice and the force of injustice... When that force of justice has advanced, the force of [in]justice has essentially sought to stop that advance oftentimes violently and Americans need to recognize that both forces are inherent, [and] have historically existed within this country.”

“Compromise is not valuable in its own right, and justice seldom dwells in the middle.”

In the article “There’s Nothing Virtuous About Finding Common Ground,” Tayari Jones writes, “Compromise is not valuable in its own right, and justice seldom dwells in the middle.”

I find that stepping onto the side of justice involves not only looking in the mirror, but looking in the past, reflecting on the years of unfair advantages I have taken. Do I want privilege to remain when it lies in the pathway of success for my friends and family, students and colleagues? When it impedes the fulfillment of the promise our country claims to offer?

It is uncomfortable to cease returning to the same curriculum and canon in which I was once a student. But do I want to repeat the legacy of a single story and single perspective echoing through history?

It may be uncomfortable to step out of the middle, to cease compromising, and to take a side, but doing so on the side of doing what is right, what is just, and what is fair, for ourselves, and for each other.

Control Over the Dishes: Distance Learning is Exactly What Educators Need Right Now

by Lori Campbell ('17)

I don't attribute all of my life's philosophies to the 90's tv show *Roseanne*, but one episode in particular changed my perspective on teaching, and it helped me when I made the move to distance learning. Roseanne was working in a fast food restaurant at night, and that meant husband Dan had to make sure the kids did their homework, did their chores, and got to bed on time. Roseanne returned home with her sister Jackie to find that D.J. had done the dishes for Dan in exchange for being allowed to stay up to watch a scary movie. Roseanne was livid. The dishes were all sticky since D.J. was really too young for that job, and he was going to be having nightmares because of the movie. Dan explained that his intention was to redo the dishes himself after the movie was over, and he would handle any issues with D.J. Roseanne was still throwing a fit when Jackie pulled her aside and uttered these words of wisdom, "Give Dan the power over the dishes." Well, my life changed.

I am happily employed as a distance-learning teacher and have enjoyed this position for five years. The Kern High School District in Bakersfield, CA provides students with the opportunity to complete their college preparatory classes online while still able to attend their home school activities. This benefits students with health or anxiety issues as well as those students who are involved with a number of extracurricular activities that may impact their schedules. So when the COVID quarantine thrust colleagues everywhere into my world, I've been able to talk many of them down from rooftops, bridges, and choo-choo trains. I was surprised when my math teacher neighbor came into my office completely distraught, certain that two of her students were cheating off each other. "How do you know?" I asked, "Because no one writes equations that way!" It had something to do with a rogue x . (As an English teacher, I just nodded my head sympathetically.) But I quickly realized what her real problem was: she'd lost the control she once had. Before COVID, her students came in and took exams proctored face-to-face. Under the current circumstances, she can't do that—and she has since discovered that there are sinister apps out there that solve problems for students. Now she has to completely rethink her tests. She did admit, however, that the truth comes out in other ways, and, eventually, these students get caught when they cannot perform even the most basic tasks. But who is that on? The students or the teacher?

First, and foremost, give the control of the learning over to the students. They need to embark on a Hero's Journey, and we must become their Mentors.

Teachers are all about control, and that is not a bad thing. The best teachers have set up their classrooms for maximum efficiency. We make sure that every tool in the room is easily accessible, each student is able to see the teacher and the places of instruction (white boards, projections, etc.), and every distraction has been removed. Teachers are also the classroom superintendent, ensuring that students know how to properly pass in papers, locate supplies, and ask for permission to use the restroom at the appropriate times in the least intrusive ways. Those who can do this are considered "Champion" teachers by Doug Lemov and others (Lemov 2010). But COVID-19 and the county health departments have removed teachers and students from those

rooms, and that is when the control stopped. What so many people have failed to grasp is that DISTANCE learning is completely different from classroom learning.

If this pandemic has one silver lining, it is this: we now fully understand that the lives of our students are more important than just their knowledge of content.

The phrase “distance learning” has, unfortunately, been tied to a more archaic term: Correspondence Courses. During a time when the U.S. Postal Service was dependable, adults of the 1800s who received little schooling because they lived in rural areas or were required to support the family in place of going to school were able to take correspondence courses to master skills that could provide them better income. The Chautauqua Movement in the 1870’s allowed for underrepresented and marginalized Native Americans to also earn “certificates of study” through correspondence courses (Kentnor 24). When Guglielmo Marconi invented

the radio, correspondence courses were set up to teach people how to use these communication devices, thereby changing the mode of distance learning. Likewise, television brought lessons of various types into the home. Once the internet became available to everyone, the University of Phoenix became the first “online” school (through Compuserve) to offer degrees to people across the country (Kenton 28). Such programs are beneficial to society, but there has been a stigma attached to them, and it is related to a lack of control by those in education. Many of these early programs were not accredited, and the reputations of the institutions offering these “certificates” were often dubious when compared to the degrees offered in face-to-face institutions.

Make no mistake: classroom teachers have nothing to fear when we return to a full-time schedule again. Distance learning only works for independent learners with the maturity to self-regulate. But do not assume that whatever was effective in the classroom can work through Zoom as well. The only way this could possibly be successful is if each child at home has one reliable device with a strong internet connection. The child is in a room closely monitored by an adult who can observe him or her and determine when attention is wandering off task, redirect the student’s focus, and then quietly sit aside watching the child perform. There are very few of these. In one class, students can range from working on the latest and fastest computer to a foster youth or even a homeless child who has to borrow a device, a hot spot, and find a quiet place to work. They may or may not have adult supervision in the home. In fact, they very well may BE the adult supervision in the home! It is not uncommon for a high school student to monitor one to several grade-school children as they engage with their teachers in a Zoom while trying to attend yours. Many students would prefer that you not see their rooms or dwelling places, particularly if those siblings are causing disruptions, so they refuse to turn on their cameras. They have not taken cues from their teachers who have painted shower curtains to hang behind them, broadcasted from the bathroom so they have a clean white surface to write on (their shower walls), or purchased the green screen that allows tropical beach backgrounds in Zoom to appear. (My husband’s cue to put on a shirt is when I have headphones on!) As teachers who have learned about classroom control, we are able to transfer our ability to consider accessibility, distractibility, and visibility for all students into our own homes, but we can’t control it anywhere else.

Successful distance learning is asynchronous. This seems to be the new educator dirty word replacing “differentiated instruction.” However, it is a reality. We cannot control when students learn in their own environment. Parents work, siblings cry, dogs bark, the gardeners come, the internet loses connection, and it’s a lot harder waiting to use the restroom when it is only 10 feet

away. In this COVID world, normal is tenuous. Everyone is working under tremendous pressure (unless they are unable to work, and that is a different kind of pressure). We must give control of the learning over to the students. Distance learning does not require distance teaching. Instead, we provide distance COACHING. We need to use our synchronous time with students effectively. The last thing students need is punishment for things beyond their control. A colleague of mine has a son in middle school who was deducted points because his internet connection dropped. He tried to text the teacher through *Remind* and email the teacher as soon as the connection was re-established. And once it was, the teacher left him in the waiting room because she was too busy to click the button allowing the student back in. Imagine the damage that does to a child's self-worth.

So how can we make distance learning work? First, and foremost, give the control of the learning over to the students. They need to embark on a Hero's Journey, and we must become their Mentors. Hamitch could not go into the arena with Katniss. Obi Wan had to guide Luke from the great beyond. And Professor Dumbledore did accompany Harry on his quest to find the Horcrux, but that didn't turn out so great for him, did it? There are some very important ways we can mentor from afar.

Create personal connections with each student.

Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and John Hattie put out a marvelous aid called *The Distance Learning Playbook* (2021) for teachers whose classrooms were once their domain. This is a workbook, a quick read, and it is the definitive way to reach students through cyberspace. Module 3 in this book is all about how to establish relationships between students and teachers through online study. The authors begin the module with this: "Knowing one's students as individuals with rich stories to tell and aspirations for their futures is an essential disposition for teachers" (Fisher, Frey, and Hattie 47). From the moment we greet students and through the entire session, we are learning about them. In distance learning, it is helpful to keep a seating chart with notes that indicate the special needs, learning situations, and obstacles each student faces so that you can learn how best to help them. I have students create a Google Slides presentation that only I see. I invite them to tell me however much or little they want, and I make notes for each. I also give them immediate feedback to tell them how I might be able to help, and how they should ask me for specific interventions.

In this way, the coach gets to know the student's strengths and learning goals. We learn who the visual learners are (it's amazing how many know what they are!), we discover those who hate to read out loud, we know those who live for hockey, football, track, soccer, etc. We uncover how they feel about reading, writing, and math, and we do our best to help them achieve their goals. We can only do this if we know each of our students.

Establish the growth mindset and nurture it.

In the initial activity, I also learn what the students don't think they can do very well. In many cases, what students interpret as a deficiency is actually a very healthy way of learning. They all feel they are supposed to "get" a text after the first read. They will often just read words and not comprehend anything on the page, and they think this is abnormal. I don't know how many times in my feedback I wrote, "This happens to me all the time!" I've had students remark that they were such poor readers they couldn't get through a piece without having to go back a couple of times

and reread it, and others who write that they are deficient in grammar and vocabulary while submitting complete paragraphs with topic sentences, a variety of sentence structures, and sophisticated vocabulary.

I am able to help students to clarify their goals, as well as suggest achievable plans. One student talked about how she has never found a genre of book she liked to read. While that sounds heartbreaking, I am helping her determine if she just doesn't like reading books. Does she like to read other types of materials, or does she actually have an unidentified learning deficiency? I will be watching her annotation skills with articles we read, so we can work together to determine the source of the problem.

If you have designed your class appropriately, the computer is doing the direct instruction for you. The time your students spend with you should be in coaching mode.

Provide three-tiered, meaningful feedback and allow unlimited resubmissions.

My most significant learning experience from Solution Tree was "All Things Assessment." (I attended the session "Feedback in Action" by Garnett Hillman.) This technique can be life-changing for writing teachers who are struggling to keep up with all the grading and feedback we have to provide--particularly in this online world. The philosophy starts with the growth mindset. Each assignment is the student's attempt to show standards-based skills. Therefore, feedback works on this principle: (1) Tell the student which skills they have successfully demonstrated. (2) Tell them the next skill they are ready to work on. (3) Give them the specific instructions for what they need to complete next. And that's it! I include a standards-based rubric to give students the point value on their skills, but they are allowed to resubmit assignments as many times as they wish to get the higher grade on the rubric. Depending on which skill is most important for the student to master, I limit annotations on their writing to just one or two needs. The best part about online submissions, particularly in a Learning Management System such as *Canvas*, is that we have the capability of recording our feedback orally. This can shorten grading time and still provide authentic feedback for our students. I do this for every student.

Embrace asynchronicity

Let's not forget our history lesson. The purpose of distance learning from its inception was to allow people who had other lives and needs to still receive the education they wanted on their own schedule. These are people who worked, raised families, and had spare time primarily in the evening hours to devote to study. We are also finding that students in this quarantine are actually benefiting from not having to start school so early in the morning. The website [Start School Later](#) is devoted to persuading districts across the country to change their start times to accommodate a teenager's unique sleep pattern. According to their studies, the secretion of melatonin which puts the body into a sleep cycle begins as much as 90 minutes after a child's or an adult's biological system. This is the reason that parents find teens hard to wake up in the morning--they are still deep within REM sleep, and the secretion of melatonin hasn't stopped. They also require 10 hours of sleep versus the recommended 8 hours for adults. Colorado University, in their study, "One silver lining: Sleep improving under stay-at-home orders" (Marshall 2020) reports, "...researchers found that [under quarantine], on average, the students were devoting 30 more minutes per weekday and 24 more minutes per weekend night to sleep. Those students who had been

skimping on sleep the most pre-pandemic saw the greatest improvements, with some sleeping as much as two more hours nightly." Distance learning turns out to be a way for students to complete work when their bodies are awake.

During the full distance learning schedule in the Kern High School District, students are still required to attend blocks of time with their teachers twice a week, alternating between two periods. However, many teachers are requiring that students complete all work by 3:00 pm even though they are in online Zoom sessions from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm. This puts tremendous pressure on students who are used to a regular daily schedule outside of their homes. Now add to that schedule parents who must work leaving the oldest child in charge of the younger ones. These teens now become the teacher's assistants for the younger students. I have a student in this position who meets with me by choice at 11:00 am each school day to go over her assignments for the day. The level of noise in her house is tremendous. She has a first-grader and a fifth-grader in her house that she monitors for their working parents. I told her the other day, "You know, in eight years, you won't hear a peep out of them." She quickly retorted, "I am NOT going to be here in eight years!"

These students need time to work with the curriculum we give them, but on their own time schedules. I know that for the younger grades, this is pretty much impossible. But what I know about teenagers is this-- they perform their best work from 5:00 pm to 1:00 am. And with everyone else in the house asleep, they are fully able to concentrate on their work. Oh, they get a little upset when they have a question at 6:00 pm and you have turned off your push notifications for *Canvas* (which I HIGHLY recommend for your own sanity), but they will have a block time scheduled weekly that they will be able to ask their questions. They also know they can send me a message at any time, and I will respond as quickly as possible during school hours. Your synchronous time with students should *not* be for teaching. If you have designed your class appropriately, the computer is doing the direct instruction for you. The time they have with you should be spent in coaching mode.

Make assignments due weekly. Give students a chunk of time to get tasks done so that they may use whatever time works best for them to focus on the tasks and do the work asked of them. Be sure to estimate the amount of time you expect students to complete any given task so that they can budget their time wisely. Place this time in the title of the assignment or at the top of the instructions. From personal experience, I have found including this results in much more engagement and participation in a timely manner. As long as the dishes are done by the next time they are needed, does it really matter what time they are washed?

Change the curriculum if your student has a better idea.

Sometimes what we plan, especially in the light of the day's chaos, is not exactly what students can really concentrate on. If we are willing to promote the growth mindset, we need to fit our curriculum into the lives of our students. Does this mean extra work for us? Not necessarily. And with curriculum now available in tidy little packages (depending on who put them in *Canvas Commons*), it is possible to assign students their own module.

I am teaching seniors, and they were working on a module about the issue of fake news and how our information is fed to us based on our interests and biases. But one of my seniors, whom I will call Miriam, called me up to say that she couldn't get into the module because she was in the

Give the student choices of pathways to find their ways through the learning process. And if you don't have the right choice, ask the student to provide suggestions. You will be surprised at what you can learn from them.

process of working on college applications. Miriam has been my student since she was a freshman, and I know that her current reading and writing skills are on target for an incoming college freshman. She also has very little experience with social media—she doesn't even own a smartphone. The only reason she currently has internet access is to take distance learning classes. No wonder she couldn't get into the topic! Fortunately for both of us, I was just finishing a second semester module for my juniors about making the choice between college or career and developing a portfolio

for whichever the student might choose. I asked Miriam to pilot the module for me. Because my district uses *Canvas*, I am able to place just one student in the "course" with the assigned module. Miriam wasn't able to discuss content with other students, so she wrote to me instead, providing me feedback from a student's perspective on how useful the assignment was. Then I just substituted the grade from the new module assignments in the appropriate slots for the module she wasn't participating in. Was it more work? Not very much. And the best part was she found my errors and bad links before I run the module next semester with my juniors.

Students love getting the opportunity to set their own goals. Like DJ, they may not yet be mature enough to fully tackle the job, but by giving them the feeling of independence and maturity, we nurture the growth mindset. Likewise, when we provide a choice in how to demonstrate skills, students will take the best path for them. For example, we may give a choice in a culminating activity to write an expository essay, a narrative, or create an infographic. Many teachers (and even some students) think, "That infographic is nothing! I will just take the easy way out." Anyone who has tried to create an infographic that can still be evaluated by the same expository rubric soon discovers there's nothing easy about it. But there are kids who want that challenge. This is the Universal Design for Learning. Give the student choices of pathways to find their ways through the learning process. And if you don't have the right choice, ask the student to provide suggestions. You will be surprised at what you can learn from them.

Remember the goal.

Ultimately, we are charged with making sure our students have the skills they need to succeed in the pathways they choose. We need to be familiar with those choices. I have a student who lives and breathes to play hockey. He didn't realize how important English was to him until his mother took his sport away until he got his grades up in class. The only way I will be able to work with him is by knowing he loves hockey. Fortunately, I am somewhat a fan, and I'm also of Canadian descent which helps. I need to find everything I can to help him achieve his goal to play hockey and be successful in life. I have told him as much, and he is now working with me where, before, he was fighting me. If kids aren't submitting work, there's a reason. Find out what it is. Ask your students what their goals are. What do they want from life? Then work to find the pathway where you can guide the student along the way. They are distance learners. Give the control of the learning over to them. But they won't learn like you do. They will leave the dishes sticky. Make the process easier. Stand alongside them and talk them through. Model the proper way to make sure the entire plate is clean. But don't criticize the sticky dishes if the child has tried to do it right. Acknowledge their success, tell them the next step in the learning process, and then lay out the next steps for the student to take.

Finally, don't do this alone—it is *hard*! When we first developed the Kern Learn distance learning program, I worked with a team of four other teachers from different subjects. We made a great site learning community, and we were able to solve problems together. But it took us at least two years before we really felt comfortable with what we were doing. And the first year, at least for me, was learning about control. All of my failures were due to my wish to maintain control over the learning of my students. But when I was able to talk with each student, determine their strengths, their learning goals, and their learning styles, accommodating their needs was much easier.

If kids aren't submitting work, there's a reason. Find out what it is. Ask your students what their goals are. What do they want from life? Then work to find the pathway where you can guide the student along the way.

Many years ago, my principal called me a Pollyanna. I had to look it up to make sure he wasn't insulting me. But he was correct, because here's my philosophy: distance learning is exactly what educators need right now. They are stressed beyond all previous measures. Trying to support a family and doing your job well while being in foreign territory sounds a lot like that episode of *Roseanne* where she found herself working in a fast-food restaurant. But that meant she had to change her role at home as well. As you work from a distance or in small cohorts, you will have to adjust and adapt. The best news is that all of our modifications will help students and will be just as effective when the schools reopen. Going back face-to-face should not look like it did at the beginning of March 2020. If this pandemic has one silver-lining, it is this: we now fully understand that the lives of our students are more important than just their knowledge of content. It is their whole being. So, as I virtually place my hands on your shoulders and look you straight in the eye, let me tell you to give control of the learning over to your students. They will love and respect you for that.

Lori Campbell is the English department chair for Kern High School District's Kern Learn Program and has developed the curriculum for grades 9-ERWC as well as an online creative writing class. This is a complete distance learning program that provides students the option to take their A-G required courses online. She holds her master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction.

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Thursday, October 29th 2020

Today, I taught 20-minute classes outside behind my regular classroom so students (and teachers) could get a sense of how outdoor classes would work

So good to see you all in person! Let's write notebooks in our five minutes

English Welcome to the class

The new laptop I bought for Jenny warped at the bottom so I gave it to the Fedex deliveryman

At 4:15 we met at the trip shed with the faculty and Midland rangers

Just let the rangers be in charge - we're here to support them

6 ft. 6 ft. 6 ft.

After an early pizza dinner we hiked to tank mesa and slept under the stars

Can I have my meds?

Let's have a dance party

John Isaacson's Comic Diary

These are just three samples of the comic diary entries that John Isaacson ('16) has been posting on Instagram. With the light touch of a cartoonist, John deftly captures his madcap procession of pandemic days. He's a teacher at Midland, a demanding college preparatory boarding school, as well as a husband and dad, and as the comics reveal, the various duties often blur together.

In addition to academics, John's day might include overseeing a socially distanced banquet on a soccer field, instructing new students about emptying lint from dryers, or grooming the fire pit for s'mores sessions. There are important family missions too, like buying his wife an anniversary present or taking his daughters to a pumpkin patch.

It's an interesting kind of journaling, and a good reminder that a little bit of love-fueled levity can help sustain us.

Tuesday, December 1st 2020

I taught ninth graders at 8:45 am

We're going to read these newspaper articles and write the paragraph topics next to them

In the late morning, I had the Sophomores in the library (max capacity 16) for an intro to Harkness discussions

Gilgamesh's only real struggle is psychological

We had bag lunches on the soccer field with our advisory groups

Which are vegetarian?

Here are some wraps.

After teaching a few more classes I went home and made dinner for the girls and put them to bed

Uh-oh!

Ouch!

How would you like Eggo waffles for dinner?

Thursday, December 3rd 2020

One of my classes did not read the homework

Did you read eleven?

It wasn't on MyMidland

So we read it aloud and actually had a decent discussion

Oh-oh John!

Here comes the porta-potty truck!

coffee tree

On let's go to...

But in my last class very few people seemed to do the reading.

Hmm this sounds interesting, I wonder what happens next...

At Faculty meeting the Black Student Alliance gave a presentation on microaggressions

Calling students by the wrong name...

I've done that...

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O Me! O Life!

BY WALT WHITMAN

Oh me! Oh life! of the questions of these recurring,
Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill'd with the foolish,
Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more foolish than I, and who more faithless?)
Of eyes that vainly crave the light, of the objects mean, of the struggle ever renew'd,
Of the poor results of all, of the plodding and sordid crowds I see around me,
Of the empty and useless years of the rest, with the rest me intertwined,
The question, O me! so sad, recurring—What good amid these, O me, O life?

Answer.

That you are here—that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.