

Dialogue



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Inside This Issue:

Yo, we out there. Let us thrive.
Alejandra Lucero Canaán, p. 2

“But even if they do overcome these experiences, at what cost? What do they lose when their voices are silenced, their knowledge questioned, their identities erased? What do we lose? Let me give you some tips on how to avoid perpetuating white supremacist thinking, especially when you’re well-intentioned in a diverse classroom.”

**Unconscious Biases
in the Classroom**
Stephanie Lange, p. 4

“How do we educate individuals, especially those who do not speak a second language and may lack empathy, to be kind and respectful toward others who do not speak their language precisely? How many times have we, as educators, not realized the scars that we leave on students with our words?”

**Taking Action with Social
Justice Standards
in the Primary Grades**
Ann Linn, p. 6

“Many people feel that children in the primary grades are too young to learn about social justice issues, in particular race relations. I came from the ‘color-blind generation’ where we were told not to see color. We were told that it is awkward to bring up such things and that we should love everyone regardless of a subjective factor like skin color.”

**Being a Social Justice
Educator Requires a Focus
On Black Joy**
Jamie Lanham, p. 10

“Remember that a text itself is not anti-racist. The lesson that follows the text and the conversations you have with your class are just one of the hundred ways to fight racism. Remain diligent and stay strong. And don’t forget to focus on Black joy.”

**Creating a Classroom of
Difference Makers: Bringing
in Diversity to a Predominantly
White Community**
Alicia Rhoads, p. 11

“As students became more aware of the world around them and outside of them, I needed to help address the implicit bias that plagued our classroom and school community. Although students were strengthening their connections together, I wanted to continue exposing my students to various strong role models that were seen in females, people of color, and in children their own age.”

**Building Community
Virtually Through
Writing Response Groups**
Katie Martel, p. 16

“Writing Response Groups were key to building our community and allowing campers’ voices to be heard. They allowed campers to have a safe place where they could meaningfully share and interact with a

handful of peers in a low-pressure environment. We shared more, we laughed, we took chances, and we all grew from the experience.”

**Embrace the Pivot: The Words
We Can Write in 2020**
Joe Ferro, p. 20

“But can something, previously packaged with the trappings of a summer program, resplendent with its get-the-kids-out-of-the-house promise, be just as good online? The short answer is no.”

**Excerpt from
“Eleven Hearts + Minds”**
Angela Lathen-Ballard, p. 23

“As they continued to speak, I listened. I witnessed each of these eleven young people speak with conviction about violence, race, inequality, and the need for humanity.”

Also in this issue:

SDAWP Institute Fellows 2020, p. 7

Thank you, Carol!
by Kim Douillard, p. 14

Carol and Her Golf Cart
by Frank Barone, p. 15

Welcome, Angela, p. 15

Project Notes, p. 15

Young Writers' Camp, p. 17-18

Call for Manuscripts, p. 22

Calendar of Events, p. 24

Yo, we out there. Let us thrive.

Alejandra Lucero Canaán, SDAWP 2020

There were a lot of issues with both my educational and life trajectory in Mexico, so when my parents decided to move my education to San Diego for a chance of a better life, I was excited for the challenge and the benefits of such a sacrifice.

I was excited, too, because while in Mexico, academics can focus too much on memorization, I had heard that American schools valued more important things like critical thinking. I knew I would appreciate a change of pace. Thus, like many others in the borderlands, I became a transnational student in seventh

grade.

Unfortunately, the problem quickly became clear that the famed “critical thinking” experience I so looked forward to didn’t include any part of anti-racist teaching pedagogy. Time and time again, whether it was my accent, behavioral expectations I brought from Tijuana (such as standing from your seat to answer a teacher’s question—not a thing here, at all...), or my identity as a border-crossing student, teachers looked at me differently.

Early on, when I was in high school, I was slated to take a speech class. I wrote a speech and was immediately labeled a plagiarizer. How could a quiet little girl from Tijuana write in English that well? Never mind that my schooling in Tijuana, since first grade, included English classes. Never mind I had already, at that stage, been in American schools for three years. Never mind that I had always been a reader and a writer, so those types of tasks were always going to be my strongest work.

The teacher, Mrs. B., tried to fail me.

I was livid. I didn’t have time then to unpack the racism, so I grabbed a bunch of essays I had written for my English class and shoved them in her face, “Look! I write like this ALWAYS. I didn’t plagiarize.”

She looked stunned. Maybe other Mexicans didn’t fight her this hard. Mrs. B. didn’t even read these new essays. She glanced at them with surprise and looked at my speech paper, a big red “F” over the top right corner. She got her pen, crossed it off and wrote: “C.”

This is but one example of the many

aggressions many minoritized students (whether they be students of color, immigrant students, students with disabilities, etc.) experience, endure, and try to overcome. But even if they do overcome these experiences, at what cost? What do they lose when their voices are silenced, their knowledge questioned, their identities erased? What do we lose?

Let me give you some tips on how to avoid perpetuating white supremacist thinking, especially when you’re well-intentioned in a diverse classroom.

Do your own research.

- Black and Indigenous writers, scholars, and brujxs and curanderxs have been informing everyone how to fight white supremacy, and white supremacists as early as Cristoforo Colombo (not the anglicized “Columbus”), Hernando Cortés, and the folks of Jameston and the Mayflower have been trying to shut this wisdom down.
- Read, read, and re-read Black and Indigenous people’s books, essays, art, and other work.
- Use this work in your class with clear attribution. Let your students know of the wonderful Black and Indigenous scholars we’re all learning from. Do not take BIPOC wisdom and make it your own—that’s white supremacy and colonialism.

Check your privilege at the door.

- Sure, maybe you have never had issues with the act of raising your hand in a classroom because you’re a confident white male that’s always been praised for being assertive (not aggressive) and asked for your opinion. But maybe your student isn’t, and how they engage with your class and the world may not look like how you think it should look.

- Even things you consider to

Dialogue

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Confronting Racism, Representation, and Microaggressions in the Classroom

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be “basic” expectations could be (read: are) white supremacist: how a student participates and talks, how “engaged” they look, attendance policies, communication expectations, eye contact, how they sit, how they listen to music, their hairdos and clothes, and if they talk in another language with their friends.

Rigor and rigidity in teaching isn't doing anyone any favors if you're killing students' spirits.

- Your students are tougher than you.
- They don't need your help “toughening up.”
- Give a student a pencil if they need it and don't fail them if they didn't staple their essay, for crying out loud.

Do not meme a culture to be cool.

- You're not cool—we can tell you're appropriating and being inauthentic.
- Do not utilize one thing from a cultural group because you like it or you think your class will like it. Suddenly starting to use “hola” (with inaccurate pronunciation, no less) or wearing an embroidered Mexican blouse from your trip to Chiapas is not a replacement for actually knowing and understanding the cultures of your students.
- Don't stereotype. If you want to authentically honor a different culture please realize you'll never really be “in” enough, but you can show curiosity and humility in your own exploration as an alien to that culture. For example, 5 de Mayo is not what you think it is, not all brown people are Mexican, and not all Mexicans are immigrants. Have you ever heard the phrase: “the border crossed us?”
- Also: support BIPOC businesses while you're at it. Don't colonize the place, though. And don't put it on your Instagram.

(In tune to “Don't be suspicious” from *Parks and Rec*)

Don't be performative! Don't be performative!

- Be OK with being wrong.
- Be OK with not being the center of attention, or having your feelings heard, understood, or cared for.
- Be OK with not knowing, not being the expert, or the boss in the room.
- Be OK taking a step back and becoming a tool for change, not the protagonist of the change.
- Be OK with flexibility—every time I hear someone complain that they're reading “contradictory” information on what to do and things are just so hard, I cry-laugh. Yes, welcome to my life. As a Mexican immigrant, I'm simultaneously labeled-too lazy to be worth anything to capitalism and also a hard worker; I'm out there stealing all the jobs! So, of course, I'm also undesirable on any functional level. I also shouldn't speak Spanish because “go back to your country.” We all just deal with contradictions and discomfort. Learn to be comfortable in the uncomfortable.
- You can hang in there and discern what you're able and willing to do. And if you're not sure, talk to your students. Is what you're doing working for them? Get yourself involved in a community of people who are doing the work, and if you don't want to do the thinking, then be their brawns.

Pronounce names well and accurately.

- If that means practicing, then practice. But don't brag about it. Just do it.
- I don't know why that's still an issue.

Stay on top of local, U.S., and International news that directly affect your students.

- How are your transnational, migrant, undocumented, and Mexican students and families doing since the COVID-19 border closure started in the spring? Or with the unprecedented immigration halt? Or with any of Trump's bans on immigration: Muslim, Chinese, H1B workers, and others?
- Are you involved in the Kumey-aay's fight against the blasting of their sacred sites to build Trump's border wall by Border Patrol?
- Do you know the students leading the Get Cops Out of San Diego Unified schools movement?
- Get to know some of your local organizations and participate!
- Participation can mean sending money, sharing information, volunteering in some capacity, and/or showing up.

Labor-based contract grading.

- Stop grading your students' past teachers' work instead of the work they're doing for you in the now.
- Read Asao B. Inoue's work and get on it.

If you think you, and the world, can't change, it's because you don't want to change.

- Get therapy, reconnect with nature, do genuine, non-capitalist self-care.
- Journal, cry, cook.

Heal relationships and heal yourself.

- White supremacy hurts us all. The only difference is that a few people dry their tears with money while the rest of us lose track of our tears in our sweat as we work to survive.

Decolonize yourself.

- Enough said.



Unconscious Biases in the Classroom

Stephanie Lange, SDAWP 2020

Are unconscious biases practiced inside the classroom? Many times, we, as educators, do not realize this behavior because we do not see it with our own eyes or hear our own words, but students can clearly see it, feel it, and hear it. According to the *Unconscious Bias and Higher Education Equality Challenge Unit (2020)*, unconscious bias is defined as a bias that we are unaware of, and which happens outside of our control. It is a bias that happens automatically and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations. These judgments are influenced by our background, cultural environment, and personal experiences. So, these are the questions we must ask ourselves: Have I been a victim of unconscious bias? Have I committed unconscious biases as an instructor?

I have my own story of experiencing unconscious bias in the classroom. I recall a presentation I gave in graduate school in San Diego when I mispronounced the word "aphid" and a student said: "If you don't know how to pronounce or speak English, you do not have the right to be here." I said nothing because I was embarrassed. The professor commented that I had a great presentation, but she never said anything to the student about being disrespectful. I was more offended by the professor's inactions than the insult from the student. A professor/teacher is supposed to protect and create a safe environment for all their students, and in this case, I was not protected, nor did I feel safe.

This incident of microaggression happened when I was in graduate school, but I still feel embarrassed and scared. I still struggle with speaking in public whenever

I am around colleagues. I am very conscious about my squeaky voice and my accent. I get nervous when I speak in public, and I speak slowly so that I can avoid mispronouncing words and potentially offending someone. Many Americans stress the importance of speaking proper English, but that is not the only

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facet of being an American free from receiving bias and prejudice. For example, some of my role models, such as Secretary Albright and Governor Schwarzenegger, do not speak English in a polished fashion, but they are able to express themselves in an inclusive, unbiased manner. I am originally from Puerto Rico where the primary language is Spanish. English is taught from kindergarten through high school, but it is not the same level of English taught in schools in the United States. This is where my accent derives. Despite living in the United States for the last twenty-five years, it is occasionally difficult for me to formulate thoughts in English, and I know from personal experience how hard it is to sound like a native Eng-

lish speaker. So, when I am in the classroom, I always tell my students if I mispronounce a word to please forgive me. I am a work in progress.

Many of my students identify with me because they have encountered the same obstacle. They are smart and are taking English classes to learn English, but their lack of confidence in speaking the language scares many students to death. As a result, many students prefer to sit in the back of the room and become invisible. I know exactly how they feel when someone says "What? I don't understand you!" or when others snicker when they hear you mispronounce a word. These types of incidents create stress, fear, and bottom-down shame. How do we educate individuals, especially those who do not speak a second language and may lack empathy, to be kind and respectful toward others who do not speak their language precisely? How many times have we, as educators, not realized the scars that we leave on students with our words? We do not hear ourselves speak, but our students hear us loud and clear. Students approach their teachers for guidance because they believe in us. Not only do they believe in us, they also trust us more than anyone in their immediate surroundings. We have to take a moment to pause and think about our words and actions before we open our mouths to speak to our students.

Even today, many professors write offensive notes on EOPS documents on which we inform counselors of a student's progress in the classroom. For instance, this is one comment from a math professor at one of the colleges where I currently work: "He/she is a good student, but he/she needs to speak better English." I was very bothered by this comment because it is insulting. I have to question whether people, and in particular educators, write and say things with intent to harm because of our backgrounds or personal experience, or do they speak and write things without regard for the consequences, or do they simply not care because they are faculty members

who are in positions of authority and can get away with microaggressions without any repercussions?

We continue to see many stories of unconscious biases that continue to go on in the classroom with individuals who call themselves teachers/professors. This problem was in the news recently when a math professor from a community college in Oakland, CA said, via Zoom, to a Vietnamese student that she needed to Anglicize her name to sound more American. Not only did he tell her to change her name, but he further insulted her with a comment in an email that said the following: “pronouncing her name in English sounded like F—boy.” He continued in the email saying, “If I lived in Vietnam and my name sounded like eat a D---, I would change my name to avoid embarrassment” (“College Professor Demands”). Once again, was this professor influenced by his cultural environment or by his personal experience? Can we put ourselves in a student's shoes for just one minute? Why was no concern exhibited for her cultural environment and personal experience? Our schools and colleges are filled with students who come from many different ethnic backgrounds that we must embrace because they have lots to contribute to our educational institutions. These students are the ones who make our schools and colleges rich in language and culture.

I studied a TEDx Talk, “Creating Your Own Label,” by Arturo Castaneda, for an assignment for an online course that I am currently enrolled in. Mr. Castaneda narrates the story of his upbringing in Southern Texas. He lived in a Colonia (colony) and was part of migrant families who lived and worked near the US-Mexican border. These families worked in the agriculture field. He narrated that Hispanic students were labeled at school as “ESL at-risk students.” I had never heard this term before, but this is what his counselor, coach, and teachers referred to Hispanic students at the school. He also narrated a conversation he had with his school coach: he informed his coach

that he wanted to go to college and study fashion and the coach's reply was, “Fashion is for girls and sports is for boys, and you should play sports to get a scholarship.” It should be shocking that a school counselor and a high school coach would say such words to a student who wants to go to college to pursue a career in fashion. Again, this reminded me of unconscious biases that lead to damaging microaggressions. These two individuals, who are supposed to help and counsel students and guide them on the right track, failed this student. Educators and counselors must realize the impact and implications of what they are saying to students.

Our schools and colleges are filled with students who come from many different ethnic backgrounds that we must embrace because they have lots to contribute to our educational institutions.

If we are working in schools, especially schools where the socioeconomic neighborhood is below the poverty level, we must be careful with the power of our language. In the words of Rita Pierson, “We should never give up on any student, and we should value the importance of human relationship.” So, I asked myself, how many times did I infringe unconscious biases in my classroom without even knowing it? Did I engage in this behavior consciously or unconsciously? What were the circumstances of my bias behavior towards my students?

Since I participated in SDAWP's Summer Institute, I have been

brought to a standstill to learn more about this topic and to reflect on my own practices and experiences—no matter how insignificant they initially seem. For instance, I like to draw smiley faces on student papers that receive high scores, but when students get a low score, I never put a smiley face on their assignments. So, if you ask me if I have ever engaged in unconscious biases in the classroom, I will have to say absolutely. Did I do this on purpose and if so, what was my intent? Is it just habit, and if so, what are the ramifications? Not only do I intend to learn more about this subject, I want to become a better instructor for my students because I know from experience that actions, words, and symbols matter. I have to strive to become a better teacher and correct my own unconscious biases to become a better human being.

I ask myself once again: are unconscious biases practiced in the classroom? My answer is yes. Educators have the crucial role to protect students from not only their peers but also from our own misconceptions. We should not use our personal experiences and prejudice to make assumptions on innocent students whose sole purpose is to come to school to get an education. We need to provide training and even offer college courses that deal with and teach anyone who is thinking of becoming an educator not to engage in this degrading behavior of employing unconscious biases within our classrooms.

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Taking Action with Social Justice Standards in the Primary Grades

Ann Linn, SDAWP 2020

When the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was going full steam, I thought my 2nd grade students in my very culturally diverse school were semi-prepared to address issues of social injustice. After all, we studied biographies such as Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Caesar Chavez, Susan B. Anthony—all famous people who fought for their rights or the rights of others. This was part of their social studies curriculum which I integrat-

We need to bring these issues to the present day and, although there has been improvement, the students need to know that the social injustice is on-going.

ed with writing non-fiction reports. We spoke about peaceful protests, boycotts, speeches, and letter writing to effect change. But when they were faced with similar current issues in our world today, they failed to make the connections between the past and the present. After much reflection, I realized that we need to stop the notion that these historical figures solved the racism/sexism problems and they no longer exist today. We need to bring these issues to the present day and, although there has been improvement, the students need to know that the social injustice is on-going.

While working on a letter writing unit, I had an opportunity to delve into some of these issues. One of their final assignments of distance

learning was to write a letter to the mayor. Some asked for things such as a new playground at an intersection, while others wrote about more hard-hitting topics such as racism, which uncovered some interesting perceptions. Some said they were confused as to why only black lives matter. One child felt that “Blacks all of a sudden were being mean to the Mexicans.” Where was this coming from? One child was afraid that someone was going to come to his house and shoot his family. Another asked the mayor to stop hiring evil policemen. I was concerned that these topics would be too challenging to fully address in this unit, but soon realized that this gave me the chance to address their concerns.

It is better for children to be able to communicate those kinds of fears, so they can be discussed and clarified with both teacher and parent intervention. I also learned that if we are going to put something like this out there, that we should be prepared to respond thoughtfully and in an age-appropriate manner. Preparing some scripted responses beforehand could be helpful. For example, when a child asks why don’t all lives matter, you can respond with something like this: Of course all lives matter. The African American community, however, has been treated unfairly throughout history and are still seeking fair treatment. They are the ones who are hurting now, so we want to stand by them, so it’s like saying Black Lives Matter, too.

Many people feel that children in the primary grades are too young to learn about social justice issues, in particular race relations. I came from the “color-blind generation” where we were told not to see color. We were told that it is awkward to bring up such things and that we should love everyone regardless of

a subjective factor like skin color. The problem with this approach, however, is that it negates one’s identity and suggests that we are all the same, when in fact we are not. Then it becomes more difficult to talk about it and that silence can be deadly.

Parents and teachers fear that bringing up the topic can create a problem that does not exist or that it will bring up questions and issues they are not prepared to answer or children can comprehend. However, research has shown that children notice race at a very early age and can make decisions based on this.

“In a study that followed approximately 200 black and white children from the ages of six months to six years, Katz and Kofkin (1997) found that toddlers as young as two-years-old use racial categories to reason about people’s behaviors (Hirschfeld, 2008), and numerous studies show that three to five-year-olds not only categorize people by race, but express bias based on race (Aboud, 2008; Hirschfeld, 2008; Katz, 2003; Patterson & Bigler, 2006)” (qtd in Winkler 1). “In a yearlong study, Van Ausdale & Feagin (2001) found that three to five-year-olds, used racial categories to identify themselves and others, to include or exclude children from activities, and to negotiate power in their own social/play networks” (Winkler 1). Based on this information, it seems essential to start this education as early as possible.

Teaching Tolerance has identified four standards of teaching social justice issues: identity, diversity, social justice, and action. “Divided into these four domains (IDJA)—the Standards recognize that, in today’s diverse classrooms, students need knowledge and skills related to both

prejudice reduction and collective action. Together, these domains represent a continuum of engagement in anti-bias, multicultural and social justice education" ("Social Justice Standards"). Schools seem to cover identity and diversity, but often fall short with social justice and action standards. Schools have an obligation and responsibility to teach to those standards and strive to raise a generation of change makers. This is just as important for predominantly white populations as for racially/ethnically diverse populations. How can we raise changemakers if they do not know that change is necessary?

The first step is to
practice
self-reflection
to determine your
own feelings and
prejudices,
so you do not
unconsciously
pass it on.

Age appropriateness

The struggle is real. How can we address the issue of systemic racism while protecting the innocence of our children? Dr. Laura Markham sheds some light on the subject in her journal *Aha Parenting*. She suggests that "children six to ten are old enough to hear about what's happening from friends or online, so don't avoid the discussion. You'll want to ask what they've heard and open a discussion about it. They're also old enough to talk about all the issues here: race, guns, protests. BUT obviously you will have to tailor your explanation to your child's developmental understanding" (Markham 2).

"Research shows that elementary schoolers do have nightmares in

response to news reports, because the news shows them a world that is scary and chaotic. Reading the newspaper together is educational, but children under the age of twelve still should not be exposed to news coverage, which is purposely sensationalized to gain audience share" (Markham 2).

She also suggests that you calm yourself before speaking with your child so your own outrage and fear do not scare your child and reassure your child that he and the rest of the family are safe. Give the basic facts of the news story and feel free to research the question before getting back to him or her (Markham 2). Always end the discussion positively. Assure them that change is possible, that many people are working to make things better, that progress is slow but real, and that there are things we can do to stand up for their rights (Markham 2).

In line with these parenting tips, teachers should answer questions as they come up thoughtfully, but not over-share information that the child may not be ready for. The Sesame Street CNN town hall offers an excellent example of this approach. Children and parents posed their questions to a panel including a mayor, pediatric psychologist, and other experts on the topic. Programs such as these see other children in similar situations and give them the language they need to phrase their questions.

Anti-Racism Policies and Lessons

The first step is to practice self-reflection to determine your own feelings and prejudices, so you do not unconsciously pass it on. Teachers should be able to model openness. This may be especially difficult because it likely was not modeled for you. Consider the materials that you use to teach all content. Many parents who also grew up in the color-blind generation may consider it inappropriate to discuss these issues at a young age. Be prepared to discuss why it is important to start early.

Congratulations SDAWP Fellows 2020

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Align social justice with school values and character education programs. That might mean revamping policy statements to reaffirm the mission and to further include anti-racism statements to become more action-oriented. The Children's Community School of Philadelphia has a strong policy and walks their talk.

My school addresses the values of respect, responsibility, and community where we focus on one trait a month with daily lessons. Social justice standards can be embedded under any of those character lessons, while making an intentional effort to teach it. We do morning meetings which include discussing a character value: what it means and giving specific examples. The students participate in role play and discuss scenarios. We talk about concerns when an issue arises and may address it in an impromptu meeting. Sometimes, we include an activity like a puzzle or art project: helping hands mural, chain links, community puzzle which everyone has a part to play and ways to grow a respectful garden. This helps children take an abstract idea and make it more concrete by demonstrating what it looks like in everyday life. These activities will hopefully not only help them understand these values, but offer ways of how they can act upon them in their lives.

Our morning meetings were originally implemented as a way to reduce behavior concerns and to encourage positive social-emotional interactions. Distance learning marked a decrease in behaviors, so unfortunately many of these activities were canceled when distance learning began. Although many of these conversations are better in person, it is more important than ever that we develop those connections. In my case, I saw more inequities in socially disadvantaged families and linguistic skills. We still shared our successes and concerns about the pressures of learning online when you have multiple children in a family trying to share a space and computers, connectiv-

ity issues, frequent changes in child care arrangements and even helping out with siblings while the parents worked. It was important to address those complex issues in an effort to bridge the gap. I made some deliveries of materials and gained much insight into my students' living conditions and what they had to deal with on a daily basis while trying to learn. Remote or in-person, children count on their community to help navigate some of these issues.

The children could see that some children had a head start, so a discussion of fairness ensued. When we begin to see racism, sexism, and other -isms as causes to fight against, it invites action.

Integration and Inclusion

Social Justice can be embedded into many different subjects and does not need to be addressed during a morning meeting/character lesson. Take advantage of those teachable moments. It can certainly work with music, theater, art, social studies, science, and literature. Curriculum can also include the contributions of everyday heroes. Students can relate to everyday people and their successes become more attainable. It is still important to study the major figures, while ensuring that they are studied with a multidimensional approach without putting them up on a pedestal. Biographical writing should include personal lives as well as accomplishments. Many of these so-called heroes were flawed and it does students a disservice to white-wash history.

Inclusion does not merely involve skin tone. Recently, Asian children have experienced an increase in discriminatory behavior with derogatory references to the pandemic. Activities that include the discussion of prejudices against physical characteristics, like eye shape and hair texture, should also be included in any tolerance-based activity. Gaining deeper knowledge about other cultures can widen one's appreciation and respect for other populations.

Privilege

Although tricky and uncomfortable, it is important that children, even this young, develop an understanding of privilege. Alison McLeod, an anti-racism educator who has served on local and national social justice task forces, uses a lesson from UUA called Windows and Mirrors where students distinguish between privileges they have and skills they developed. This is a great way to include other marginalized communities, such as students with disabilities, into an understanding of privilege. Also included in this plan is a story about Juliet Hampton Morgan, a privileged white woman who fought for equality. This story provides a very strong model of how one can be an ally for those who do not have the same advantages. Likewise, Christine Piatkowski, peace camp teacher, described an activity where she placed children in different starting points in trying to make baskets. The children could see that some children had a head start, so a discussion of fairness ensued. When we begin to see racism, sexism, and other -isms as causes to fight against, it invites action.

Activities

I'm a big proponent of using activities to get complex ideas across to children:

- **Read Alouds:** In the midst of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, I had the students listen to a read aloud by Bob Marley's grandchildren about his famous song and talk about

what that meant to them. The *Social Justice Books* and *Embrace Race* websites offer some excellent book ideas. These books are already leveled according to age group, so it takes the guesswork out of it. It's important to stock your classroom library not only with books about diversity, but also books that address bias and inequities and what we can do about it. Other examples include: *Soldiers for Equality*, *Planting Stories*, *Let's Talk about Race*, *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*, and *Sofia Perez for President*.

During a recent staff meeting, one of my colleagues spoke up about his experience with being apprehended by the police on multiple occasions without doing anything.

- Power writing: I have students take an emotional word like anger, joy, fear and write about it for five to ten minutes. Younger children can dictate or record their voice or have an adult write for them or even draw out cartoon type responses.
- Letter writing to officials and creating signs for protests.
- Virtual Museum visits to explore various cultures: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race>
- Puppets: Puppets can be used to address complex issues. A puppet's ability to help children relax generates communication. Çaganaga and Kalmis note that

puppets can help in developing communicative skills especially because children feel more relaxed when they talk with a puppet than with a teacher. Çaganaga and Kalmis write: "the enjoyable atmosphere that the puppets create breaks down the barriers between the teacher and the children."

- Guest speakers: During a recent staff meeting, one of my colleagues spoke up about his experience with being apprehended by the police on multiple occasions without doing anything in particular. He was even thrown in jail and ripped of his possessions because he was sitting in his car. It demonstrated a lot of courage for him to share his story. If he were to share his story in an age appropriate manner, it would bring racism to the here and now, front and center. As one person comes forward, others have the courage to do so as well. It is very empowering.
- Community service projects: Teaching Tolerance has many activities separated according to grade level and they can be easily adapted across grade levels, including #USvsHate messaging contests across mediums.

Remember the power is in the follow-up. There should always be a discussion and a reflection after an activity. Otherwise, children may think that it was fun when we strung ourselves together in the community web, but fail to make a connection between the concept and the activity. Do your best to ensure that this connection is made.

Teachers in the primary grades have the opportunity to create a diversity umbrella that all are welcome in our community, but also go deeper and with the intention to address the particular concerns as necessary for their population. They can discuss how we can be allies for those who are not treated fairly. This hopefully will begin to inspire a sense of re-

sponsibility. It is important to give our young students choice and a voice. Children have an innate curiosity and sense of justice recognizing what is fair and unfair. We need to channel that energy into something positive. Otherwise, it may not manifest in the way we hope. The time for action is now.

Resources:

Children's Community School Mission: <http://www.childrenschool.org/justice/>

"Stand Up" Read Aloud: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdquehFJ-0Q>

CNN/Sesame Street Town Hall: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/06/app-news-section/cnn-sesame-street-race-town-hall-app-june-6-2020-app/index.html>

Social Justice Books: <https://socialjusticebooks.org>

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Being a Social Justice Educator Requires a Focus on Black Joy

Jamie Lanham, SDAWP 2010

In his memoir, *How We Fight For Our Lives*, Saeed Jones writes, “Just as some cultures have a hundred words for ‘snow,’ there should be a hundred words in our language for all the ways a black boy can lie awake at night.” We should also be able to name one hundred different ways we fight racism in our classrooms every day. As educators, we spend time carefully choosing our words, our curriculum, and evaluating our values on behalf of our students. Especially our Black students.

When the news reports a story about a young Black male, we close our eyes and know that they are really talking about a young Black BOY. The five-year-old who loves ninjas so much he’s convinced he is one. The eight-year-old who wants to play the piano for the talent show (but has never played the piano). The twelve-year-old who is working on his swagger, but can’t stop talking about Minecraft. The child labeled a “young Black male” is just that: a child.

Similarly, our society adultizes young Black females. The one that has three dress code violations? She’s a seven-year-old GIRL. The one we police because her hair is too big when she’s not braided? She’s thirteen and proud as hell of her poofs. We must strive to be more protective and less punitive of the young Black girls in our classrooms because it’s literally our job to preserve their innocence. The world is already judging them prematurely.

Now more than ever educators are searching for anti-racist resources. And it’s important for educators to read books about race, culturally responsive teaching, allyship, and anti-racism. Please, read them. Read all of them. But when it comes to our role with children, we also have the very important task of humaniz-

ing the students of color in our classroom. To do this, we must remember to talk with our young students about race. We must do the important work of discussing oppression and systemic racism and the impact it has on lives today. We need to check our privilege and understand microaggressions. But we must also remember the importance of reading literature and sharing resources with our students featuring Black people, Black children especially, just being human.

How many books in your classroom feature Black joy? What books do you read aloud that share stories of Black children learning something new, falling in love, going on adventures, and solving mysteries? How many books in your classroom simply normalize gender-fluidity, having gay parents, or feature LGBTQ characters simply living life?

The work we are doing with students regarding identity and diversity, understanding justice, and confronting systemic racism should continue to be at the forefront of what we do in our classrooms each and every day. But normalizing that ALL children think and feel and love and lose and win and have emotions will help them be SEEN.

In my kindergarten class, we started our distance learning with building a writing community. The first two weeks of school, our read alouds included *I Promise*, by LeBron James, *Except When They Don’t*, by Laura Gehl, and *Love Makes a Family*, by Sophie Beer. Through these texts we learned to talk about ourselves and our lives. We learned to listen about the lives of others. And we shared joy in our similarities and differences. Each of these books subtly showcase characters, either in pictures or in words, with diverse ethnicities, families, abilities, and

religions. Each of my students was represented in some way.

Throughout the next few weeks, we launched our narrative writing unit and read *A Squiggly Story*, by Andrew Larsen, *I Am Truly*, by Kelly Greenawalt, *The Snowy Day*, by Ezra Jack Keats, *Jabari Jumps*, by Gaia Cornwall, and *I Am Every Good Thing*, by Derrick Barnes. These texts helped us understand that writers write stories about their lives and served as mentor texts for beginning our own narrative stories. These books didn’t focus on the struggle of being young and Black in America, but rather featured Black boys and girls who simply write about their feelings, their adventures in the snow or in their classroom, and pretending to be a superhero or a princess in their everyday lives.

Prioritizing the humanity of students will help them feel represented, included, and understood. Showcasing our students of color in ways that are not always trauma-focused will build a space that values diversity, seeks justice, and understands why the phrase #BlackLivesMatter is so relevant and important for all of us.

We want our students to thrive, not simply exist. In his book *All Boys Aren’t Blue: A Memoir-Manifesto*, George M. Johnson states, “Navigating in a space that questions your humanity isn’t really living at all. It’s existing. We all deserve more than just the ability to exist.”

Indeed. An important part of our role in social justice is making sure our students do more than just exist.

So do not hesitate. Read all of the books. Host the conversations. Answer the hard questions. Wrestle with your own thoughts and feelings. Remember that a text itself is not anti-racist. The lesson that follows the text and the conversations you have with your class are just one of the hundred ways to fight racism. Remain diligent and stay strong. And don’t forget to focus on Black joy.



Creating a Classroom of Difference Makers: Bringing in Diversity to a Predominantly White Community

Alicia Rhoads, SDAWP 2020

At my most recent school, I was hit with a new reality and culture shock. My previous classrooms were filled with diversity of different races, languages, and life experiences. When I walked into my new classroom, I was met with more white faces than I had ever seen in my classroom before. There was little to no diversity. The students were defined as academically low—defined by the adults around them and defined by themselves.

Unsurprisingly, when talking to students, they did not feel a sense of community or respect. Students would do the bare minimum to meet expectations, they did not want to put forth any extra effort. They relied heavily on teacher input and directions for work, little to no real-life writing, scripted worksheets, and primarily teacher-directed learning. My students didn't see themselves as learners or as a community. They needed to learn how to find their own voice and see themselves as academically capable. Along with academically finding themselves, I wanted them to view themselves as difference makers.

In the beginning of the school year, I had heard comments from various students that caused me to reflect on the needs of my students:

“Do you like Muslims? Do you like Syrians?”

“We aren't a family; nobody here are my friends.”

“He isn't cool. He is poor.”

“When will we read about people that look like me?”

“He doesn't talk. He doesn't know anything.”

Along with students' comments, there were the occasional comments made by educators about the success of students:

“They are already so behind. They are a lost cause anyway.”

“Why are you putting in so much work into this? I can't believe you are doing this on your own time.”

“Gosh! When am I going to get to the smart kids' work?”

Along with academically finding themselves, I wanted them to view themselves as difference makers.

With comments like these being made about students, it was no surprise that they were feeling unmotivated to be in our classrooms. Our school population has changed over the years, and the diversity is beginning to blossom. We have the highest population of EL learners in the district and some teachers were not feeling prepared for this change. With their insecurities, came labels like “lazy” or “unmotivated” or just simply “bad,” which continued to push a gap between student relationships. Students may not hear these microaggressions explicitly, but it can be felt in the interactions held between their teachers and

their peers. All of these indicate that we should evaluate not only how we address things to students but reflect on what we are teaching our students. Each of these comments have served as a call to action and reminder that what we teach matters.

As I entered into my sixth year of teaching, I had experienced different school environments, various levels of student privilege, and grade levels, but all students craved an environment that they felt respected them. I have always been passionate about building a community of learners in my classroom by building connections with students through a safe community and a strong sense of belonging. Considering the comments students had made of one another, and the comments or actions from teachers around them, it was clear that their environment was hindering their learning. By the end of the year, my main goal was for students to feel connected to one another, to respect each other, and to respect themselves in order to increase their love of learning.

In growing as an educator, I had the opportunity to learn about an approach of teaching that encouraged students and teachers to be engaged in work that was challenging, adventurous and meaningful, and where learning and achievement flourish. The mission was to create classrooms where teachers can fulfill their highest aspirations, and students achieve more than they think possible, becoming active contributors to building a better world. In Ron Berger's *Expeditionary Learning*, the emphasis was placed on teaching students various learning principles such as self-discovery, responsibility of learning, empathy and compassion, and collaboration. Along with creating a strong classroom community, students would be

engaged in various learning opportunities—expeditions—that would explore new ideas and bring practical components on how they can give back to their community. I noticed that the academic success was directly correlated. Students were proud of their work and were wanting to do the work for themselves, not just the teacher. Students were more invested in how the learning would affect them and how they could grow as an individual or active citizen. But before they could engage in the work together, we needed to build a community.

Students need to feel connected to their classmates to build upon relationships and to actively engage with one another. In the start of the year, a strong emphasis was placed on conducting morning meetings, class meetings, and continuing conversations around restorative justice. Students engaged in various protocols that encouraged deep conversations, building comfort among their peers, and building relationships. I knew that we had successfully formed this community when students were able to solve conflicts with meaningful conversations and would make a concerted effort to include one another in discussions. Students were beginning to trust one another and feel comfortable in taking risks together.

In our first expedition together, students explored the various schools around the world to introduce diversity into our classroom. My students had the misconception that schools around the world were similar to what they had been exposed to: classrooms with desks, recess, safety, and playgrounds. To practice our community building protocols and understanding of diversity, they explored various schools from Mexico, Colombia, Afghanistan, Chad, and Africa through read-alouds. These colorful stories opened their understanding of key components that all schools held and showed them the power of learning can take place anywhere. They later dove into research on how communities in Haiti have rebuilt to bring back their

schools, students in India attended schools on a bus, and how students in New Orleans created school gardens to give back to their community following Hurricane Katrina. Students pointed out their misconceptions and were starting to see how schools were not just a building, but a place where people gathered to learn together. They were diving deep into learning and were becoming more curious about the world around them. Students who were born in different countries would share their own stories of their parent's schools and wanted to open up about the different languages they spoke. Others would share what they wanted in our classroom and would speak openly about what they needed from their peers. As their culminating project, students created a list of classroom norms and made efforts to bring the values they learned from the diverse parts of the world into our own classroom.

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Room 10's Classroom Norms:

- Respect each other
- Show up to learn
- Do the best you can
- Encourage others
- Help those around you
- Be kind
- Take risks

After the first expedition, classroom norms had been set and I was beginning to be more of a facilitator and observer. Students were becoming more confident in risk-taking, and it

was showing in their everyday interactions and their work. They were actively applying their classroom norms with one another and holding each other accountable. Relationships were being formed both with the students and with me. The class was beginning to find their groove, and it was time to continue their growth.

As students became more aware of the world around them and outside of them, I needed to help address the implicit bias that plagued our classroom and school community. Although students were strengthening their connections together, I wanted to continue exposing my students to various strong role models that were seen in females, people of color, and in children their own age. This exposure was important for them to continue their growth and for them to start seeing themselves in the curriculum. I spent weeks putting together a unit of study for students to explore diversity and social justice. I pulled together books that brought in cultures of my students and cultures that were unheard of. I tore apart the social studies text to meet the needs of my learners and explored various resources that would bring out diverse thinking.

In their second expedition, We All Can Be the Change, students were focusing on how people work together to solve problems and to change the world for the better. Students had a superficial understanding of the Civil Rights Movement and knew that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was someone to know about. They knew that Black people were not treated fairly and that schools were segregated. This was ingrained in them, but it was hard for them to see any other problems and many felt that that racism was done. They knew that racism was bad, but failed to see the bigger problems of inequity in our current society and how they can help be a difference maker. Students were asked to broaden their thinking about how people are inspired to make change and how they can apply this to their own community. They were diving deep into the lives

of people such as Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafazi, Sonia Sotomayor, and Claudette Colvin. I purposefully wanted students to learn about the unsung heroes that our traditional educational system does not cover.

In their self-discoveries, students were diving deep into what qualities made a difference maker. As students learned of powerful women in the book, *She Persisted*, students were amazed how many women were in charge of the world and their contributions to society. Male students, who frequently felt an implicit bias towards women, were beginning to see that women could be powerful and brave. They were seeing that women too could be just as good or even better than some male leaders. Students were then falling in love with the story of Malala. They were on pins and needles learning of her story and would find themselves infuriated with the inequity and disrespect women learners faced in Pakistan. They were engrossed by the sound of Malala's voice as she made her speech to the United Nations. Toward the end of this unit, they were wanting to take signs and sit with Greta day after day to make the world safer and preserve nature. They were finding themselves so entranced by the activism and power of these people and wanted to emulate them in daily life. As a group they took all that they had learned, connected to, discussed, and created a list of qualities that make a difference maker. These were vocabulary terms that they have learned and were connecting key players of our study to each of the descriptions. Students each have their own story, their own heritage and purpose to be a difference maker and so it was important for them to identify key characteristics of difference makers that resonated with them.

To close out our Expedition, cut short by COVID-19, students were tasked with taking on poetry to describe themselves as difference makers and to show their true selves to the community. They practiced these poems by taking on their learning of Greta Thunberg and also from the point of

view of Malala. They worked hard to mimic the power behind Malala's words and to convey their want for the world to be more equitable. They were understanding that inequity and injustice were still around us and that they had the ability to speak

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One poem that resonated with our classroom was written by a student, who learned a lot about himself and his ability to raise his voice. When he shared this poem, the class fell silent, and each of them felt a part of them inside of it. They all were able to connect with this student, and to them, it was representative of what they wanted to share with the world, together.

"I wonder when will Dr. King's work be done?
I hear Black people are being hurt.
I see white people protecting black people.
I want a more peaceful world.
I am protecting.
I understand how I can help others
I say we need to stop the violence
I dream there should be equal rights for black people and white people
I try to help all people
I hope the violence will stop!"

As I left my most recent school, I provided my students—and self—with a culture shock and new sense

of belief in themselves. The students were academically achieving, and there was a common respect and feel of family inside those walls. Students wanted to succeed and be the best versions of themselves. They relied on their peers for assistance, themselves to persevere, and for me to help facilitate. My students saw themselves as lifelong learners and as a community. They found their own voice and saw themselves as academically capable.

My goal for these students was to show them that outside of our community there is a larger world. I wanted my students to be aware of inequity and how they can help put a stop to microaggressions. I wanted to teach them how to persevere when things get difficult. To be intrepid when they see inequality and speak out for what is right. To be an activist for their community and for others around the world. My goal went beyond making them learners but also making them difference makers and trailblazers into their future.

Here are some lines from student poems:

"I am a world helper."

"I wonder if we can look the same.
I hear people yelling.
I see people showing kindness.
I want to show joyfulness."

"I wonder why this is happening.
I hear people wanting to help"

"I understand how to be kind.
I say I can be strong
I dream for the bad stuff to be gone
I try to be a better person to people
I hope that the world will find peace"

"I understand everything
I say stop hunger
I dream for Hunger to stop
I try to spread acts of kindness and tell others to do the same
I hope the world will be a better place
I am brave"



Thank You, Carol!

Kim Douillard, SDAWP Director

For more than 20 years, Carol has worked for the San Diego Area Writing Project (fondly called SDAWP by all who know and love it!). She took a job as an administrative assistant in 1997 and over time turned it into a career where her expertise, passion, and commitment made her an indispensable program manager—not to mention the person we all know and love. In an organization that is purposely decentralized, Carol has been our center.

She is the person we all reach when we pick up the phone, the one who responds to emails without delay. She answers questions, keeps track of paperwork, and makes our lives easier. When Carol is around, things hum that tune you just can't get out of your head.

Carol finds a way to communicate effectively, efficiently, and seemingly effortlessly. She crafts emails that teachers actually want to read: clear directions, specific information, and warm thoughts all wrapped up and received like a gift rather than a duty. Carol wields a phone like no other, in a day when people no longer make phone calls, she makes them enjoyable! With headset in place, she answers questions, schedules rooms, describes programs, soothes frazzled teacher leaders, and counsels nervous parents worried about their young writers.

Carol writes, edits, and responds to writing of all types. She tackles a report with pen in hand, reading not just for errors, but with professionalism and clarity in mind. And formatting—she is a wizard at making documents beautiful, fitting them to requirements of margins and font and page numbers and character counts.

Along the way she builds relationships, makes friends, and promotes the Writing Project. Carol finds a

way to collaborate. Over the years she has become expert at enticing others into thinking about teachers, writing, students, and learning. Carol looks for opportunities to bring SDAWP teachers into conversation, into planning, and into turning dreams into reality. Collaborating with a team of SDAWP teacher leaders, she has shepherded



our Young Writers programs from a small single program to a well-oiled machine (that isn't machine-like at all—except for in terms of efficiency). Hundreds of students arrive in SDAWP classrooms summer after summer, and leave with confidence, new friends, and an appreciation for writing that many couldn't imagine before participating.

Carol finds a way to create: systems,

teams, and a sense of purpose. Office organization is Carol's superpower. She creates filing systems, naming protocols, and the most amazing calendar ever used. Carol manages dates, deadlines, databases. Like that beloved sensitive and responsive animal, the elephant, she never forgets...and like an elephant, she gently guides the rest of us into her systems and organization. Carol keeps teachers and students at the center of her thinking, finding ways to create timelines and systems that work for an organization filled with people who all work full time somewhere else. She manages to keep a sense of calm and order, and works to solve problems wherever they crop up.

Carol finds a way to care with her full heart and being. If she has met you, she will forever remember you. She'll recognize you in the local Trader Joe's, ask about your children (by name) when you call the office, and probably even remember your address if she has sent you mail through the post office! Carol is a people person—she thrives on human interaction, warmly connecting with each and every person she encounters. A walk across the UCSD campus exemplifies this quality as she seems to know someone everywhere she goes. Carol finds a way to be loved. Sending out the kind of energy that is magnetic, drawing in everyone she encounters.

Even in retirement, Carol will remain an important part of our SDAWP community, someone that we will turn to when we need a listening ear, a shoulder to lean on, or some clarity of perspective. SDAWP will find a way to thrive in Carol's retirement, because she set us up for success and we can't let her down. We love you Carol Schrammel!

**Many thanks to SDAWP's own Cindy Jenson-Elliot for *Weeds Find a Way* that I used as a mentor text for this tribute to Carol.



Carol and Her Golf Cart

By Frank Barone (SDAWP 1977)

I will always picture Carol, our Secretary for The San Diego Area Writing Project, not sitting at a desk answering a phone or typing messages on her computer but behind the wheel of a golf cart driving through this scenic University to meet teachers and presenters and to greet the students enrolled in Summer Camp to welcome them and help them feel at ease as an important part of The Project's programs. Carol and her golf cart made the practical and positive connection between the office with its paperwork and the teachers, presenters, and students so they would feel comfortable on campus and apply themselves more confidently to the enjoyable work and satisfying art of creative writing.

Welcome, Angela!

Angela Ojeda was first introduced to the San Diego Area Writing Project community in 2015 through an internship when she was a senior at Preuss High School at UCSD. As an intern, and later as an SDAWP Student Worker while in college,



Angela worked closely with Carol Schrammel to plan and prepare for SDAWP's spring and fall conferences, Young Writers' Camp programs, and other events hosted by SDAWP. Because of her prior experience, Angela was well-prepared for SDAWP's administrative assistant position. In her new role, she has already helped coordinate SDAWP's first ever Virtual Young Writers' Camp, and she was an essential part of the Virtual Writing Connections Fall Conference planning team.

Angela received her BA in Human Developmental Sciences from UC San Diego in 2019 and became the first in her family to graduate from college. In her free time, she enjoys reading, picnics at the park, and playing with her cat. In the future, Angela hopes to become an elementary school teacher. We are thrilled to officially welcome Angela to the SDAWP family.



Project Notes

Check out Margit Boyesen's (SDAWP 2008) *Beautiful We* project, which highlights amazing people and the positive impact they have on their communities. The intent of the project is to shine a light on the We; the stories of people who are lifting others, creating beautiful, positive change across a variety of platforms such as education, social justice, foster care and adoption, health and wellness, and the environment. Go to www.beautiful-we.com to see Margit's stunning portraits and read the inspiring stories—and please consider recommending the beautiful people you know.

Kudos to Stefanie Shipman (SDAWP 2015) on being promoted to Associate Professor at San Diego Miramar College; it was officially conferred this summer.

Way to go, Shannon Falkner (SDAWP 2008) on the publication of *Beyond Man Vs. Nature: Utilizing Books Clubs on Nature and Climate Change to Create Engaged Citizens of the Anthropocene* in the 2020 *New Jersey English Journal*.

Nicely done, Callie Ryan Brimberry (SDAWP 2008) whose article, *Conversations in the Margin*, was published in the February 2020 issue of *Educational Leadership*.

Hats off to Frank Barone (SDAWP 1977)! His book of poetry, *The Poetry of Sport and The Sport of Poetry*, was published June 5, 2020 and is available on Amazon.

Congratulations!

- Callie Ryan Brimberry (SDAWP 2008) gave birth to son, Charlie Theodore, on March 5, 2020.
- Dave Mattas (SDAWP 2015) and wife, Valerie, welcomed June Catherine on May 19, 2020.
- Shannon Falkner (SDAWP 2008) gave birth to Beau Daniel (“Bodie”) on June 14, 2020.

Building Community Virtually Through Writing Response Groups

Katie Martel, SDAWP 2018

This summer was different; our current circumstances created a need for a big shift. Young Writers' Camp would be held virtually instead of in person. Instead of our traditional two-week camp, we only had one week together. This shortened length and distant setting presented new challenges that I had not experienced.

Yes, I was teaching virtually in the spring after the school buildings closed, but I had already spent months developing relationships with my students. Camp was my first time starting fresh with students I had never met in person and I had many questions: How do you create a community virtually? How do you help campers feel comfortable sharing their writing with others they have never met in person? How do I get campers to buy in? How do I know they are active and engaged?

How do you create a community virtually?
How do you help campers feel comfortable sharing their writing with others they have never met in person? How do I get campers to buy in?
How do I know they are active and engaged?

My team met our wonderful campers during a virtual orientation and we started our first day with brief teacher introductions going over

virtual agreements. These virtual agreements, which were brief and direct, set our expectations for our campers. Any teacher who uses Zoom, or another video conferencing software, knows there can be challenges: students turning cameras on and off, muting and unmuting, etc. We decided to approach these new set of norms with positively worded expectations that we reviewed daily as we would typical classroom agreements. Our agreement laid the foundation for success:

1. Set up your workspace: eliminate distractions, prepare writing materials, snacks, water, etc.
2. Video is on, mic is muted until ready to speak (video optional during writing time).
3. Device is charged and ready.
4. Be brave and be kind. Let your writing surprise you!

Once our foundation was laid, we presented our campers with a number of activities each day. Typically, we had sacred writing time, community building, a main lesson, and a revision/editing lesson. This schedule gave campers opportunities to work on many different styles of writing and different pieces which created variety in their day and increased engagement.

It was important for students to have a collection of pieces for Writing Response Groups to be effective and meaningful. Some activities sparked more joy in campers and each camper was different, so choice was important. We ended each day with 40-minute Writing Response Groups. That might sound like a long time, but the time flew by. In retrospect, we could have had

longer with our groups, but our time was limited.

For those who are unfamiliar, Writing Response Groups (WRGs) are smaller groups of campers (or students) and a teacher/facilitator, where each member selects a piece they have been working on to receive feedback. This process brings the writing process alive and allows for collaborative revisions.

Normally, I always share my writing with campers. I believe it is important to model vulnerability and show students that everyone gets feedback on their writing.

Day one of WRGs was largely logistics, screen sharing with students to show them where to put their writing so the group had access, showing them how to comment, reviewing expectations for WRGs and feedback structures and then finally getting to share some writing. Normally, I always share my writing with campers. I believe it is important to model vulnerability and show students that everyone gets feedback on their writing. Due to the shortened time, I shared on the first day as a test run for students to practice commenting, but I did not share any other day. I wanted to make sure campers had as many opportunities for feedback as possible.

Each day, campers selected a piece that they would share. The expectation was that each camper would read their piece and then everyone

else would give them comments using the comment feature in Google Docs using an assigned structure. My favorite structure for feedback is Praise, Question, Wish (Boyesen, 2010 San Diego Area Writing Project. YWC); but other simplified structures such as Stars and Wishes are also effective. Praise, Question, Wish is a structure many teachers use during Young Writers' Camp and students are taught the structure during the first WRG.

- Praise—say what you liked about the piece, be specific.
- Question—ask questions of the writer if anything is unclear or leaves you hanging.
- Wish—let the author/writer know where they can elaborate by wishing for more information.

Writing Response Groups were key to building our community and allowing camper's voices to be heard. They allowed campers to have a safe place where they could meaningfully share and interact with a handful of peers in a low-pressure environment.

Once written comments were made in the document, campers shared their feedback with the author verbally. This combination of everyone shares and everyone comments made it so participation was not optional and everyone was on an even playing field and received equal feedback.

When in the larger group setting, sharing was optional, but for our WRGs to be effective everyone needed to participate fully, and they did. The first two days were dedicated to making students feel comfort-

able: by day three everyone knew the expectations and were not only ready for WRGs but were excited for them. Campers enjoyed sharing with the smaller group and getting valuable Questions and Wish feedback to improve their writing and the Praise comments that boosted their confidence. They enjoyed the more intimate interactions, with less students in the writing group, each student received specific, individual feedback.

For example: "Praise: I like how you described the chips. The way you did it made me want the chips and I could taste the savoriness." This comment was shared by a camper, the author then responded by thanking the reader and was smiling.

When posed with a question or wish like "Wish: Can you explain how big the kettle corn is?" the reader was able to explain their wish to the author and the author was able to respond and then was able to make a writerly decision, would adding that detail improve their writing? Would it help the reader understand their writing?

Writing Response Groups were key to building our community and allowing campers' voices to be heard. They allowed campers to have a safe place where they could meaningfully share and interact with a handful of peers in a low-pressure environment. We shared more, we laughed, we took chances, and we all grew from the experience.

When camp ended, our campers participated in reflections about their experiences. Many campers wrote about their WRGs and how they were enjoyable, helped them grow, and were a highlight of their experience. As I move into fall, knowing that virtual learning will continue, I am going to work to include Writing Response Groups and other small group opportunities in my plans to build a strong community of learners even from afar.



YWC 2020

When schools closed in mid-March, SDAWP's Young Writers' Camp wasn't on anyone's mind, but as summer approached, we began wondering if we would be able to offer our programs as usual at UCSD and at the schools in North and South San Diego County where we had previously hosted programs. Before long, it became clear that on-site camps weren't going to be possible, so we decided to explore online options. We soon discovered that other Writing Project sites were moving ahead with virtual programming and that gave us the impetus to begin planning.

The first step was to determine if SDAWP's teacher consultants (TCs) would be willing to undertake the challenge of re-imagining YWC. We sent out a survey and were thrilled by all the positive responses. With enough TCs on board, we decided to offer a 5-day virtual program, and almost as soon as we began publicizing, the groups filled to capacity

TCs eagerly prepared and every detail was discussed, but when the first day of camp approached, we were understandably nervous about potential problems. Would technology glitches interfere? How could we build supportive writing communities online? Would our campers be as engaged in a virtual environment? However, these concerns were soon alleviated, and almost every aspect of camp went even better than anticipated.

In fact, the previous article by Katie Martel, the pieces of student writing on the next two pages, and the article by Joe Ferro that begins on p. 20 all speak to the success of Virtual YWC 2020.

We have no way of knowing what the future will bring, but online programs are likely to remain a part of YWC offerings in the summer of 2021—and beyond.

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Young
Writers'
Camp

Animal: Burrowing Owl

by Lydia Tsai

(Virtual Field Trip Perspective Writing)

He ran across the small terrain between the boulders that towered overhead. His friends sat perched on the boulders and looked down at him. Ferns and bushes surrounded the area of the burrowing owl pen. Flapping his wings, he circled above his friends who now looked up at him.

The zookeeper rattled the doorway and dropped some food in. Landing next to the pile, he took a bite from a mouse and then perched onto a branch of an almost-bare tree. A small, clay bowl sat besides a bush. It held a shallow amount of water.

The owl next to him ruffled his feathers and preened his wings with his beak. One owl hopped down from a boulder and stood in the shade of an over shadowing bush that stretched out its stalks to the sky. The shadows of the early morning waved lazily in the whispering wind.

The sun was not yet high, all the owls mingled around in their pen. The owl next to him alighted off the branch and landed on another branch that protruded out of a trunk on the opposite end of the pen. Finally, I have this tree to myself, thought the owl, and he started preening his belly feathers.

“Ugh! I’m so bored!” chirped the owl next to him.

He agreed and settled down on the ground next to the clay bowl. One of his friends flew up and perched on a branch, and he looked up at the sky, clearly bored. Oh well, there’s nothing else to do now, thought the owl. He tucked his head under his feathered wing and fell fast asleep.

Nora

By Nora Ahadian

I am like a spring day
Warm and sunny
with a chance of rain

I am a chapter in a book
Never knowing what’s going to happen next

I am like a guitar waiting quietly
Until someone plays my strings

I am a spring morning
Never knowing what the day will bring

I am blue quietly fading
in the background....

Analysis of Writing

By Sophie Bryson

The brain and the
Pen and the
Paper.

The idea from the mind
Flows to the pen.
Flows onto the paper.
Again
And again.
And again.

Crossing out
Revision
Re-doing
Mistakes

The mistakes
Are made
And corrected
And made again
Because that is what
Writing means.

Ideas.
Imagination.
Love.
Meaning.

The ideas are scribbled
And written with care
They can be anything,
Anything and everything.
This is writing.

So This Is Family

By Vera Muller

Family is a united nation,
A mix of languages spoken,
English, German, Chinese,
A mix of food served,
Pretzels, dumplings, and burgers,
A mix of traditions combined,
Lantern Night, Spring Festival,
Halloween
A mix of countries visited,
Germany, China, Austria,
This is America,
A melting pot.

This Is Twelve

By Chiara Bauer

Twelve. Twelve is middle school. Twelve is reading “novels” instead of “Chapter Books.” Twelve is face timing friends during quarantine. Twelve is being aware of your future, then planning it by accident, and finally realizing that you have time. Twelve is being appreciative of the friends that you have, and having a new love for your family.

Twelve is listening to music and thinking that every song was written about you. Twelve is waking up late even though you went to bed early. It is drawing random things so that you can think with a clear head. Twelve is talking to your dog about your day. Twelve is a morning smoothie instead of eggs and toast. Twelve is writing down every math formula ever so that you will be “prepared” for middle school and high school.

Twelve is being bored during lock down. Twelve is wondering what you want to do your whole life, then remembering that you told yourself not to worry about that. Twelve is being embarrassed by everything your parents do. Being twelve means taking on new responsibilities; responsibilities that will help you throughout your whole life.

Ancient Tombs

By Lucy Marek

I hate the idea of tombs,
dead bodies, dusty ruins,
scary buildings with no light.
But the truth is marvelous,
preserved artifacts,
cultures frozen in time,
everyday objects that are not so everyday to us.
But we will only realize this
if we step out of the light
and into the dark of a tomb...
Or if you think about it,
out of the dark and into the light.

European Armor

By Robert Murphy

I love the idea of European armor,
the shining sliver,
the intricate designs,
the connected pieces.
But the truth is more violent,
years of war fought,
scratches of weapons,
and the death that it brings.

Vanuatu Slit Gongs

By Dylan Deng

I find the first impression
of the Vanuatu Slit Gong interesting,
the red pupils,
the sculpture like structure,
and the abstraction of it.
But the deeper picture is different,
the instrument,
the hollowed out tree,
and the spiritual songs.

Embrace the Pivot: The Words We Can Write in 2020

Joe Ferro, SDAWP 2015

When I was a child, I never wanted to go to summer camp. First of all, no option appealed to me: karate camp sounded too aggressive with all the hi-yuhing and breaking of boards, music camp didn't do it for me because I didn't play an instrument, and the thought of going to some wooded retreat in a semi-secluded area with hundreds of "new" friends sounded like a horror movie waiting to be reenacted—and there would be bugs. Lots of bugs. Besides, summer was for rest, three glorious months of uninhibited, unstructured rest.

The day-in, day-out grind of teacher-assigned, in-school writing can be daunting, both for the student and the teacher, and YWC holds space to do nothing but the writing we wished we could do each day in the classroom.

I now know that not all camps are created equal.

A year after completing my San Diego Area Writing Project Summer Institute, I expressed interest in teaching at UCSD's Young Writers' Camp (YWC). As an adult, the summers feel longer, and finding something enjoyable to occupy my time gives me the structure that I now crave. For four summers, I planned, taught, and enjoyed YWC. Working with young people who, for the most part, attend Camp because they enjoy writing for the sake of writing is refreshing. The day-in, day-out grind of teacher-assigned, in-school writing can be daunting, both for the

student and the teacher, and YWC holds space to do nothing but the writing we wished we could do each day in the classroom.

But this is 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 is a test of our fortitude and will. Think *The Giver*. Think *The Hunger Games*. Think *Dante's Inferno*. 2020 is the stuff projected in books, a wild dystopian fantasy brought to life, accompanied by mass hysteria and uncertainty. If nothing else, there is an opportunity to express both our ability to be flexible and demonstrate resilience, both traits in which teachers are well-practiced, and often called upon to employ.

Transitioning online felt impossible in March. As a high school English teacher, I have three different courses on my schedule, each with its varying needs and diverse community of learners. Moving from a brick-and-mortar campus to a digital space is like having your house tented for termites: you can do it with the understanding that the displacement will be a short period of time. After all, whose house is tented for more than a few days? Yet here we are, months later, still set up in our Motel 6 teaching space. It's foreign. It's uncomfortable. It's our new normal. Yet, that "normal" didn't mean that each teacher was in the same place on the learning continuum. For many, teaching online meant full-scale integration of tactics previously unknown. Zoom? In January, it hardly registered for most teachers. Now, it is a necessary tool in our kit.

Taking Young Writers' Camp online was inevitable after schools decided not to return to physical classrooms. This logical progression left me not feeling surprised, but rather signaled

the inevitable adaptation of present-day learning. Living in the thick of COVID-19 means evolving. Immediately, adjustments were made by the coordinators to the Camp structures including professional development, mode of delivery of instructions, and staffing. Streamlining, YWC became just that—singular—a single camp hosted for interested students and families. Teaching teams adjusted to three as opposed to, in my UCSD Camp experience, two, and teacher assistants (TAs) were eliminated. These shifts felt less like fundamental changes and more like the creation of something altogether new, a birth of an amorphous program ready to be shaped by willing teachers and participants.

These shifts felt less like fundamental changes and more like the creation of something altogether new, a birth of an amorphous program ready to be shaped by willing teachers and participants.

But can something, previously packaged with the trappings of a summer program, resplendent with its get-the-kids-out-of-the-house promise, be just as good online?

The short answer is no. We simply cannot be the teachers we were earlier this year, but this does not mean we will not teach. Students cannot be the same during this crisis as before, but they will learn. We need to stop comparing, but rather accept how different teaching can still provide quality results.

Regardless of the setting, a most relished teacher-feature of YWC is working with like-minded SDAWP fellows who collectively enrich the experience. Monique Lamphiere-Tamayoshi (SDAWP 1990), Dave

Mattas (SDAWP 2015), and I all teach high school, but in our separate settings hold common values with respect to the teaching of writing. Our planning process, like everything, was done online using the Zoom platform. During our sessions, we planned efficiently and took time to unpack the complexity of teaching through technology. The lessons we determined were based both on what we believed would engage writers and be appropriate when transitioning online. Our comfort levels, at least initially, varied, but when working with good teachers the platform for the teaching is secondary to the pedagogy. With our focus on our writers and engaging them in meaningful writing, Zoom became more of instructional support than the focal point, and our attentions could shift to coaching budding writers.

If we could not have our world of UCSD, could we use the world (via the web) to inspire writing? Leveraging the world-at-large opened new doors, so we went to France—almost.

We offered students the selection between using Google Docs for their writing or a traditional notebook. Knowing that some students do not have options in their physical classrooms (with the method of writing often dictated by teacher preference), we encouraged student choice, creating flexible, self-directed writing spaces for students. Because some students opted for digital platforms over physical notebooks coupled with the distance between campers, our response groups needed to adapt. For these writing response groups, we created a matrix on a shared, online document to collaborate and provide feedback. As each student listened

to a peer's writing, they simply provided their feedback on the matrix before reading the feedback aloud. At the end of each session, writers had a physical reminder of the feedback provided. Holding to core principles of our teaching practices, although modified in delivery, and the values of YWC (everybody writes, provides feedback, and revises) and placing them at the forefront of the week was crucial, in our thinking, to the success of the students and our facilitating.

Still, something felt missing. Historically, a major appeal to the YWC programs is often the field trips, inevitably further requested on camper reflections at the end of our typical YWC sessions. Obviously, an online-delivered Camp would have its limitations; our walking excursions to Geisel Library or The Fallen Star at UCSD were not options. So much inspiration could be provided on the college campus, but we sought it elsewhere. In spite of the at-home restrictions, having full access to the internet was an unprecedented feature of this year's iteration of Camp. If we could not have our world of UCSD, could we use the world (via the web) to inspire writing? Leveraging the world-at-large opened new doors, so we went to France—almost.

In my preparation, researching online museum tours led me to none other than perhaps the most famous museum in the world: the Louvre. With multiple exhibits offering online viewing, I constructed a lesson around a virtual field trip with a focus on descriptive writing guided by observation and using an online "petite galerie" exhibit dedicated to heroes and mythology.

Leveraging the technology of Zoom, our large group broke into three different cohorts led by the teachers to explore the gallery. Each teacher took a different approach: Monique's group viewed, discussed, and wrote using three specific pieces of art as inspiration; Dave's group explored freely, but discussed collectively; my group was given a blank slate

as I guided them through the online spaces. Although the objective of the lesson was for students to create a narrative, good writing cannot be constricted to a single genre, and some students opted to engage with poetry or description. Every piece of art provided opportunity for both observation and for writing. Whether a sculpture led to a question about who a character could be or an interplay between light and dark of a particular painting provided a potential setting, the online "excursion" promoted campers' versions of written art. I found inspiration in a painting that seems ripped from mythology. Below is an excerpt from my writing:

Although the objective of the lesson was for students to create a narrative, good writing cannot be constricted to a single genre, and some students opted to engage with poetry or description.

Flames flicker, angrily licking at my toes. Lightning pierces the sky, signaling either Zeus' approval, or more likely, his impending wrath.

Conquered, the city spirals out before me, a helpless beggar, destitute, and longing for supplication. With its chalk-white surface shrouded in smoke, the palace hovers in front of me like a ghost in transit to the underworld, desperately seeking its final resting place, but there will be no rest, not until I find myself sitting atop the golden throne, flames replaced by alms at my feet.

The fierce light of the fire blazes across my shield which has

grown hotter in my hand. As I gaze on all that is mine, I understand perfectly the ravenous behavior of the fire. As it seeks air to fuel its burn, I seek power to fuel mine, but I cannot be stifled by a dousing of rainwater which has begun to torrentially pour from the sky.

Zeus has confirmed his anger.

Stepping from atop my platform, I make my way toward the phantom building, smoke dissipating around its carapace. My nascent victory pumping through my chest, the cool rain has rejuvenated my spirit further. Clutching my staff, I tread carefully over what remains of the cobbled pathway. Stubborn roots and branches seem to reach upward, grasping for my legs, but having already lost one battle today, they fall aside easily with my step.

It seems obvious now that I would be alone in this moment, celebrating my success without comrade or love.

Inspiration aside, the pangs of forced change still reverberated. Technology got the job done, but technology isn't everything. Sure, we leveraged its usage for the week, but we know as teachers that oftentimes the best writing comes from the least inhibited place, that space that allows for both introspection and reflection. Our teaching encourages the exploration of identity and ideas.

In one such lesson, Monique asked writers to reflect on their age, what it meant to be them now. As an alternative (and more-selected option), campers could reflect upon the yet-to-be-finished of much-maligned 2020. Writers soared. In one such piece, Cole uses incredible imagery and metaphor to bring out what it means to be him during this period of global instability.

This is 2020—My neighbor's house is on fire. I want to help him, but there isn't much I can

do without the flames spreading, so I continue to wait inside and pretend nothing is wrong, only hoping it won't spread more. Doing nothing does not help stop the fire though. It begins to engulf nearly every other house on the block. I stay inside though, because that is all I can really do. I close the blinds, and lock the door, because if I don't see the fire it won't bother me. I get comfortable on the couch, and get myself a nice, warm cup of tea, though the suffocating smell of smoke starts to seep in and the threat of the fire lies deep within me. I keep the blinds down, though, and pretend it isn't there, because if I were to open up them and look through the window into the world ablaze, all the suffering going on, I don't know if I could handle it. 2020 is knowing that the fire could get to you at any moment, and already has gotten to so many others, but still ignoring it to stay sane. 2020 is living a dull life while the world is burning. 2020 is sipping on your tea, pretending to be back to the normal old boring life, subconsciously pleading that the fire doesn't get inside.

Young writers have so much to say. I feel the same way: the flames of this year licking at my heels, willing myself forward. Maybe the best way we can do this is by embracing the pen, or whatever your favorite writing implements: laptop, tablet and stylus, or good ol' pen and paper.

Document this time, reflect upon the feelings of loss and frustration, celebrate the small victories. Heck, I teared up writing about making the perfect piece of toast because sometimes, that's what gets us through the day. Hold space for writing to be sacred and don't apologize for what makes it on the page. This is 2020. Things are different.

Stop comparing and embrace the pivot. Think of the words we could write.



Dialogue

Equity in STEAM Education

**Call for Manuscripts
Winter 2021 Issue**

**Submission Deadline:
February 1, 2021**

Manuscripts should consider but not be limited to the following:

- Describe teaching strategies in STEAM lessons that create an empathetic and intellectual symbiosis between students and teachers engaging in a mutual pursuit of knowledge.
- What protocols and strategies have you successfully used to facilitate STEAM learning that goes beyond the traditional dichotomy of teacher and student?
- How do you encourage students to serve as peer mentors, content area experts, and teachers themselves?
- Provide a review of research-based texts (such as those explored during study groups) that have influenced your pedagogy.

Dialogue values experiential knowledge and would love to receive reflective pieces written by educators and students.

We encourage you to submit your stories, experiences, and strategies. Please submit!

Email all manuscript submissions, suggestions, letters to the editor and/or Project Notes to:

Callie Brimberry
callieryanbrim@gmail.com

Lisa Muñoz
lemunoz@sdccd.edu

Excerpt from "Eleven Hearts + Minds"

Angela Lathen-Ballard, SDAWP 2020

In April, we had a closer examination: Civil Rights. Civil Liberties. Jim Crow. Black Codes. Segregation. Racism in the 1930s.

For the first time since we had gone out on leave during the pandemic, they spoke openly and fervently in breakout rooms. Time passed with urgency.

Questions beget questions. Vulnerability begets trust, empathy.

We start our unit on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I send a morning message to the group by way of Google Classroom:

Good morning!

We will discuss yesterday's reading, review your notes on 'Racism in the 1930s', and learn a bit about the landmark case that may have inspired Harper Lee to write the novel, To Kill a Mockingbird.

See you soon!

We view selected scenes from *Scottsboro: An American Tragedy*, the documentary by PBS' *American Experience*. For the first time, the class hears the divisive story of nine Black teenagers and two white women: Victoria Bates. Ruby Price.

Emma was livid. "How could they get away with this? They were only two poor women against all of those men? People actually believed them?"

Liam nodded, "Yeah, but they were white."

Throughout May, our days are spent discussing Maycomb's 'Moral Universe,' character arcs, and the social influences on identity through the *Mockingbird* unit by Facing History

and Ourselves. Emma and Jai ask to perform a reader's theatre version of Tom Robinson's trial and Liam and Owen create a Minecraft map of Maycomb. Identity maps of main characters are shared; we celebrate Harper Lee's plot structure and word choice, but question the role of the Black characters.

We write. We talk. We enjoy each other's time together, as graduation draws near.

May 25th: Minneapolis. George Floyd. "I can't breathe."

May 26th: 8:30 a.m. The doorbell

chimes on Zoom. It's Ryan. "Mrs. L-B, did you hear about George Floyd?"

Ryan always was the first to join our Zoom sessions. Wednesday, May 26th, was no exception. On the day after, "I can't breathe" made its way onto social media, he was ready to talk. Thankfully, after three years of establishing mutual trust, Ryan asked and knew I would listen.

"Yes, Ryan. What's on your heart?"

He spoke rapidly, questions that didn't have answers and anxieties like open wounds. I know that I saw his eyes well-up but he quickly brushed away any signs of them as his peers began to join. One by one, they entered and asked the same question.

"Did you hear about George Floyd?"

Everything that we had explored in class became exposed, present, and raw. They spoke over each other, finishing each other's sentences.

"He couldn't breathe!"

"People were telling those guys to stop it but they didn't stop. They didn't call for help. Why didn't they call for help?"

"Black people still don't have a voice. Nobody will listen."

As they continued to speak, I listened. I witnessed each of these eleven young people speak with conviction about violence, race, inequality, and the need for humanity.

"This isn't fair. It's just not okay."

Camille was adamant, "Yes, but this is what we've been talking about. This is what keeps happening."

It was quiet for a moment, and then Jai clicked the button to unmute:

"Yeah, but it can't. It just can't."



By Sienna, 8th Grade, Oceanside, CA

"This piece represents George Floyd who was wrongfully killed by police. George was held to the ground with the officer's knee pressing on his neck for 9 minutes. George told the police that he couldn't breathe 15 times which is why I quoted him 15 times in my drawing. George was a loving father and friend. His life will not be lost in vain."



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Calendar of Events

SDAWP's 14th Annual Spring Conference

Virtual Writing Connections

February 27, 2021
UC San Diego

SDAWP Study Groups

Gholdy Muhammad's
*Cultivating Genius: An Equity
Framework for Culturally and
Historically Responsive Literacy*

9:00am - 12:00pm

October 24, 2020
December 5, 2020
January 23, 2021
March 6, 2021

Equity Conference 2021:

Equity is Love in Action

January 19 - 22, 2021
San Diego County
Office of Education

For information
and to register, visit:
<https://sdequity.sdcoe.net>

#USvsHate

2020-2021 Challenge Deadlines:

December 11, 2020
March 12, 2021

For details, visit:
<https://usvshate.org/>

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