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The Research is not the End of the Assignment: Integrating Design Thinking and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals into the English Classroom



By Allison Finn Yemez
Robert College, Istanbul, Turkey

Every year our grade 9 students engage in an extended research project. For years they did a word search, digging into the denotations and connotations of words, conducting interviews, and searching for word usage. When that no longer suited our purpose, the assignment changed to an argument paper for which the students chose topics they were passionate about and then researched arguments to support their perspective.

As the grade 9 team reflected back on the diverse tasks of the past and then considered data and advice passed on from the previous year's teachers, we made yet another shift intended to address research gaps, teach new research skills, and address a tendency to use the research paper to confirm already existing biases.

This year, we assigned a literature review which asked students to complete a 360° study of existing research and debate around an identified topic which addressed some kind of human injustice and to critically evaluate those works in a written report; to complete the assignment successfully, students were

required to approach their topic objectively and examine multiple perspectives in order to gain a fuller and more empathic understanding of the injustice itself.

The topic of human injustice stemmed from our text selection up until that point: the students examined stories of displacement in Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Displaced* and Marjane Satrapi's *Complete Persepolis*, a story of persecution and noncompliance in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, and a story of the depths of racism in America in Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give*.

The idea was for the students to use their experiences with these texts to identify topics for research, but I found that the students were hungry for more.

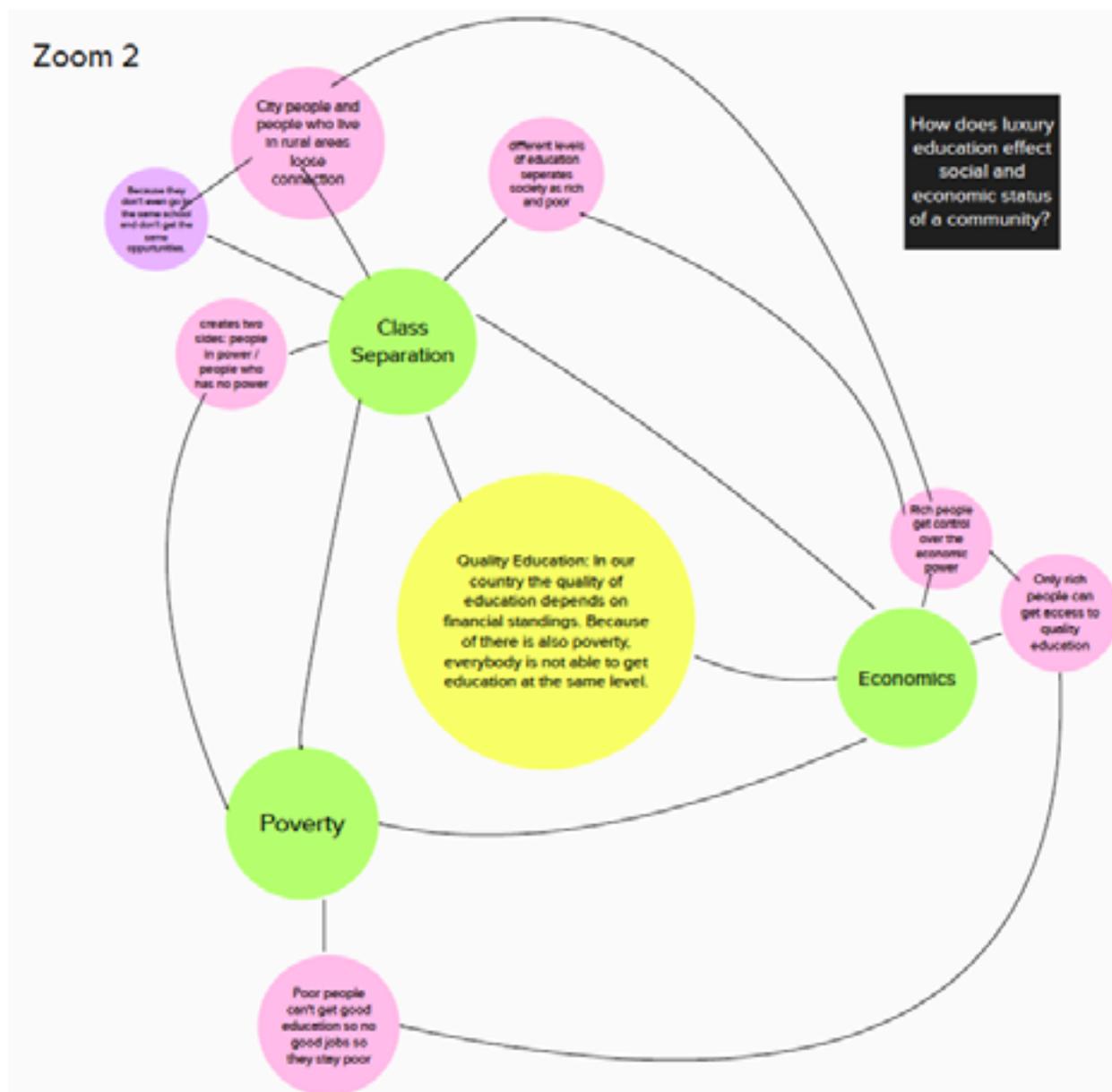


Figure 1: a student map of one human injustice identified from the exploration of the SDGs

A few other texts supplemented this reading for my students, among them were excerpts from Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed*, Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*, and news articles from local papers about femicide in our community. The idea was for the students to use their experiences with these texts to identify topics for research, but I found that the students were hungry for more.

They were already examining these topics closely and researching on their own in their reader response journals; it was time for them to understand the issues within the broader scope of the world. This got me thinking:

Our new Head of Social Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Creativity (SEIC) has been introducing projects in the school which situate themselves within the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): why not use the SDGs to contextualize the topics and move students past their own experience and into a new level of complexity and awareness? Why not use this as an opportunity to develop global competencies that will allow students to function in an increasingly interconnected world?

The class started with a deep dive into the SDGs. In small groups, the students were

asked to read through the [SDG descriptions online](#) and to identify those related to human injustice. Afterward, they were asked to dig more deeply into their identified goals and identify the relationship each one has with the topic of human injustice. A few examples of their exploration are listed below:

- The failure of the SDG 11(SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES) results in polluting the environment more. One of the results of the failure is sea pollution that essentially ends sea life and that destroys the fishing sector leaving many people unemployed. This causes a chain reaction that will, in the end, result in other SDGs to fail.
- There is a fear of losing power. Losing power over girls, over the uneducated and the poor. We must eradicate this entitlement to power.
- Some of the countries that identify the goals are hypocritical. They cause problems but they act like they are the protectors of the world like China and the United Kingdom.

[Student chat responses: What issues of human injustice did you find embedded within the SDGs?]

Each group chose one of the class responses to extend, and then engaged in an activity on Mural in which they explored all of the facets of the topic to generate a question for their research (see Figure 1). Giving the students space and time to do this exploration allowed them to develop specific and important research questions that were of interest to them and which were related to the most important issues facing our global community today.

The majority of our class time was spent getting lost in research that would provide familiarity with current literature and thinking, making connections that would support our understanding of the research, and finding patterns to help find our way out again. Students kept research notebooks documenting their thinking and our research on which I was able to provide feedback and guidance (see figure 2) and we conferenced regularly so that students could talk through their thinking, which often led them to a clearer understanding of the research they were doing. Many of the students found that their questions were still too big, and they felt that they were drowning in the research about it. As the student in figure 2 notes in her reflection, "I need to break this thing down or I will drown." Students finding their way out of the sea of research amounted to them breaking off of the sea of research and identifying rivers and tributaries for refinement and narrowing of their research question.

As we were navigating through the sea of research, we also had weekly lessons with Aybike Oğuz, our Head of SEIC (these lessons were dubbed "Tuesdays with Ms. Oğuz"), during which time she introduced the students to the concepts and protocols of Design Thinking and inspired them with stories of changemakers among the [Ashoka Fellows in Turkey](#). Design Thinking, also called Human Centered Design, is a methodology intended to inspire innovation and creativity in finding solutions to existing problems. Different organizations and schools provide different frameworks; the model adopted at our school hails from [Stanford's d.school](#) (figure 3).

I am trying to find my way in sea of broad research so I can concentrate, research something so specific that is a pond of research. I have offered my topic to "Why are African-Americans more likely to have been in prison?" which is REALLY awkward wording, now I realize.

The economical lead me to mass incarceration, which lead me to learning 40% of US prison population is African-American. Then I tried to get more specific on why is it like that? I have been still researching to figure it out because there abundant factors that play out.

I am at a place where I am able to search for related questions to my topic which will help me clearly understand the reason why. I still have a long way to go though I also am not really sure if one source review can govern all the reasons why in this scenario because the historical context, systematic racism, private prisons and many more elements constitute "why".



Why are POC in USA are more likely to get arrested?

"An analysis of arrest data voluntarily reported to the FBI[...] reveals that [...] Black people were arrested at a rate five times higher than white people in 2018." (Thomas et al.)

↳ In 800 jurisdictions and in 250 jurisdiction that number was 10

This is a news piece from abcNews; it later on says that the arrest numbers don't even reflect the actual crime number. Which forces me to adjust my course because I have read that 40% of inmates are African-American.

Is it that African-Americans get longer sentences than their white counterparts or is it that there is it that they...c statistically commit more crimes or is it that they are unlawfully arrested?

I need to break this thing down.

I will draw

- ① Do African-Americans more likely to, statistically, commit more crimes? Yes.
- ② Are African-Americans sentenced to longer prison time compared to their white counterparts who commit the same crime?

The resources confirm that the ratio of African American ... increased from 8 to 5. However,



Figure 2: a student research notebook capturing research, reflection, and questioning throughout the process.

Design Thinking Process Diagram*



Figure 3: Stanford framework for the Design Thinking process

The goal of introducing Design Thinking at this stage was to contextualize their research in a larger picture, one that will ultimately lead to innovation in the form of solutions to their identified issue. For us, the mechanics of the research process are essential, but they are not enough to place students at the center of their learning and to teach them how to “act for collective well-being and sustainable development” (OECD 2018). The merging of the research with Design Thinking was intended to “facilitate one core principle [of design thinking] referred to as ‘Stretching’...[in order to reach] deep beneath the surface” (Sharlip 2019) and thus to lead students toward developing empathy. The benefit of this pairing is that it provides opportunities to develop knowledge and critical thinking and writing skills as well as “opportunities for socio emotional, ethical and civic growth” (Boix Mansilla 2021). It also helps to make student learning visible and relevant to the lives of our students.

What the students reflected on and understood at the end of their research process this year is that research is not the end of an assignment — it is the beginning of a design for change — after all, the purpose of a literature review is to establish familiarity with a topic before beginning a new investigation which will add to the existing conversation. In groups formed around related research questions, the students created empathy maps (figure 4) and afterward experimented digitally with [Otto Sharmer's 4D mapping](#) (figure 5), intending to gain a better understanding of the “many factors and authorities at play” (student chat response) in their empathy maps and beyond. This exploration will not only help them as they move into the ideation stage of design thinking, but also as they enter a global world where the nature of work is changing and “requiring capacities to work effectively with diverse groups and to understand systems” (Reimers 2020).

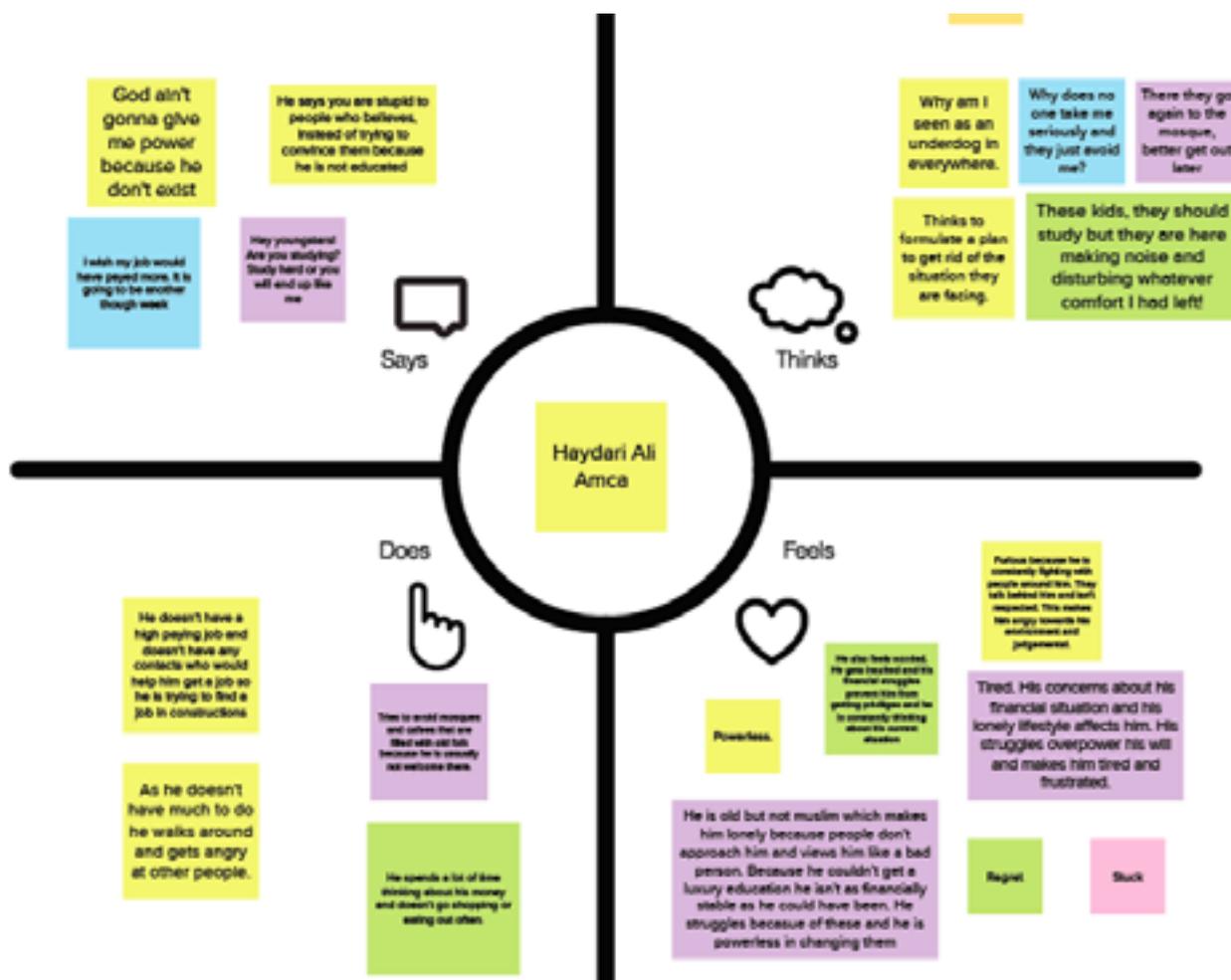


Figure 4: Empathy map for one group focusing on inequalities related to education. Empathy maps are just one possibility offered in the d.school Design Thinking Bootleg Deck available free online. Empathy maps were created on the Mural platform.

This sampling of outcomes indicate that students were inspired by this research-related process to make change in their own communities:

- One student used design thinking to address a problem he saw in his home city: "As you would remember we had some classes about Design Thinking. I used it for a problem that I saw in my city...which is a port city." (email 17 May, 2021)
- Two students decided to counter misinformation and misunderstanding with research presented in a local podcast: "me and student x are talking about starting

a podcast together where we talk about recent events and different topics." (email 21 April 2021)

- Three students applied to research programs for the summer, one is a 3 month program dedicated to sustained and deep research offered through one of the world's leading universities.

At the very least, each student in my class walked away with a greater understanding of the nature and complexity of research, how to use research methods to develop empathy and to "stretch" deep beneath the surface, and how to use the research they do as a starting



Figure 5: 4D map investigating power structures and the related systems currently at work and how the group imagines they will work in an ideal situation. Watch this video for a better understanding of the process involved in 4D mapping. 4D maps were created on the Mural.

point for real change. Because the design project grew out of the research, students were able to transfer their knowledge between the two processes: “it made me realise that there are so many areas in which change can be made for the better. And it also reminded me of our research process for our literature review; How we started with a wide topic and with research narrowed it down to a one specific and focused topic.”

The process shifted the students from seeing themselves as victims of a system to seeing themselves as the system itself: one student shared that she “used to think of a single person when somebody said changemaking. That was how I learned and saw from society when I was younger. However, now,

I understand that there is a group behind that ‘changemaker’ and making change is possible if the community supports it.” It also encouraged students to think of themselves as changemakers: in addition to the inspired student actions listed earlier, one student reflected that he “thought that for someone to be a changemaker, they needed to create an impact so big that created change around the whole world such as Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafai, etc. I am now starting to realize that if you create an impact that creates change even for a small group of people, it is still a change.”

Educating students for global competency should be “an integrative force of the entire curriculum, [one] that can help bring together

what is more often than not a fragmented curriculum, provide coherence and make visible for students how what they learn in school actually matters to their future” (Reimers 2020). When this happens, students are inspired to be the change they want to see in the world: “I believe that we, as the youth, have amazing ideas too. What we should do is to speak of our ideas, and dreams. I believe that we can find some people who are dreaming the same dreams with us, and we can create sustainable and innovative changes in our communities and maybe around the world by working together.”

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Resources (linked in text)

- [Mural Digital Workspace for Visual Collaboration](#)
- [Stanford d.school](#)
- Google Docs
- Google Classroom

Allison Finn Yemez is a National Board Certified English Literature and rhetoric teacher and Head of Educational Research at Robert College in Istanbul, Turkey. Her professional focus includes the teaching of critical thinking skills and helping students make connections that deepen understanding. Allison is passionate about offering students multiple and marginalized voices that will help students recognize a common humanity. She can be reached at afinn@robcol.k12.tr.

Using Global Perspectives to Expand Understanding of Blackness



By Mellissa Gyimah-Concepcion
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As a British-Ghanaian I have felt that I do not fit in or belong in multiple settings; that I take up too many spaces and identities. For years, this detail about myself was something that I wanted to throw away. Only recently have I begun the fight to hold onto and make sense of it. Let me explain.

Being Black and British

I began my journey as an English teacher in England. I taught at a school in Dover, Kent, where 95 percent of students were White. I was the only Black female teacher, and there was only one Black male teacher. One fine day, a student in my class called me a monkey and said I belonged in a zoo. Everyone stopped—except this boy. He continued talking, pretending that he did not know the implications of what he had spewed. The only punishment the student received was a

two-day expulsion. I was British, but I was also Black, so I did not fit in.

I have Ghanaian parents but whenever I travelled to Ghana, I was told that I sound like a White girl, and that I wasn't really Ghanaian. I was Black, but I was British, so I did not fit in. Then, in 2011, I came to the United States to further my education and was constantly asked, "What is your ethnicity?" or told, "You're not Black. You don't sound Black!" I was Black, but was not African American, so I did not fit in.

When I talk about my Ghanaian heritage, people immediately ask me what I think of Africa, or tell me that they have been to Kenya as though the two are somehow the same. Many have a single story of Ghana, and Blackness (Adichie, 2009). Despite these complexities, I thrive on the fact that

my unique voice, experiences, and global perspectives mean I do have something important to share. What I initially saw as a deficit, I have learned to utilise to expand people's understanding of global matters, the layers of being Black and the many types of Blackness.

Being Black and British in American Classrooms

While pursuing my PhD, I worked on a multi-million-dollar grant for the literacy education of elementary-aged Black boys in urban school settings. The project gave me the opportunity to contribute to the development and implementation of an exponential-growth literacy model, designed for Black elementary boys to read and write at advanced levels. Our team collectively developed literacy lessons, selecting and creating informational and narrative text across ten disciplines, and separately executed the lessons with Black elementary boys in grades three through five.

The study helped me better understand myself as a literacy scholar because I often selected texts that embodied the duality of my own experiences. It also helped me understand what I had to offer and learn in the classroom as a Black British woman teaching African American boys. At the start of the project, I worried that they would not be able to, or want to, connect with my type of "Blackness." What I found was they could not accept that I was just British because they had only seen White British people on TV. So I had to address that I was both Ghanaian and British. Just as they were both Black and American.

I noticed dialogue and questioning were vital in increasing their understandings about text, as well as their lives in relation to society



and the world. I also came to understand that I, myself, evoked many questions for the students, and that our multiple identities were something worth building on.

Questioning as a Pedagogical Move

I decided to deliberately focus on questioning and dialogue as a pedagogical move to deepen the boys' critical consciousness and global perspectives. I employed Bakhtin's concept of dialogism as a model for expanding on the students' comprehension of texts. Dialogism is inherently social; and fosters interaction with multiple works and voices to make meaning or to alter it, largely through authentic questioning.

I asked my students open-ended, authentic questions revolving around the texts we read in class, but I also asked them how each text made them feel, how each text could be applied to their lives, and how each text might apply to someone in a different country.

In one lesson, we questioned a section from the text, *Child Soldier*, by Michel Chikwanine, that explored the history of colonisation by European nations in Africa.

I began the conversation with a simple question, "Where is Congo?" Then one by one, the boys began to piece together the actions of the king of Belgium, their tone becoming more aggrieved as they realised his true motives. "He stole their diamonds," one boy

said. “Their diamonds and their resources,” another boy said. Some boys began to lean forward, or stand up, eager to offer their analysis of the situation. When a couple of boys wondered aloud why the king of another country would do that, I didn’t offer an answer, but repeated their question for the whole group to think about. “OK, so why did the king of Belgium come to Congo and steal all their resources?” The boys’ answers took the form of more questions – Couldn’t they just ask? Couldn’t they just share? – each question leading them closer to reluctantly understanding an act repeated throughout history.

“If people don’t ask or share,” I said, “what do you think they want then?”

“Power,” one boy replied.

“Control,” said another.

“Well, forget them!” a third boy proclaimed.

The dialogic talk and question-driven discussions helped the boys to clarify thoughts they already had or suspected but possibly did not know how to articulate, enabling them to share these consciousness-raising thoughts and ideas. While being in their local space, my presence in those classrooms provided a bridge to the global.

I am aware of how I seem to have answers and questions to my students’ questions and that when I am having these discussions with them, I am consistently drawing on the many spaces I have belonged to and have been a part of, and the multiple identities I carry. This detail of myself is worth not only holding onto, but also generously handing over to students. Our classrooms need to be both local and global transformative spaces, open for

questions and curiosity that we can address and grapple with together. I have slowly realised that I can provide this space based on who I am and my lived experiences, but I can only fully do this if I do not throw pieces of myself away.

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Class Matters: My Sojourn in International Schools



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At some point in the 1990s, I read Beryl Gilroy's 1976 memoir, *Black Teacher*, and it inspired my long-standing interest in black British writing. It was republished in July 2021, with a forward written by the Booker Prize winning author and academic Bernadine Evaristo, and I recommend it if you haven't yet read it. Should I ever escape my indolent spirit, and with limited aptitude for originality, I think I might title my own autobiography, *Working-Class Teacher*. In a time when some claim that social class is largely an irrelevance or does not exist, the title may seem unfashionable, Fashion; however, was never really my thing. Besides, experience has taught me that class still matters.

As you will likely know, one lifetime in teaching is not enough. Certainly not, that is, if you aspire to excellence. General improvement is, quite likely, as good as it gets.

In my own case, any latent desire I might have had in the direction of a teaching career got off to a bad start, greatly impaired by having left school at the age of 16. I grew up in a working-class district of Glasgow, Scotland, and came of age at a time of rapid deindustrialization. It was, in other words, a bad time to be working-class, indifferent to my own education, and growing up in a community where, among my peers, success in education was not generally championed. It took a number of years to recognize that pursuing an education was the only reasonable remedy available to improve my life chances or, as I like to think of it now, perhaps melodramatically, of saving my life. Eventually enrolled in university education after much toil, I quickly realized that I enjoyed it. In fact, guided and inspired by a number of wise and kindly tutors to whom I owe immense gratitude, I began to excel, and it was in this

period that I knew I wanted to become a teacher.

It was, then, shortly after my 30th birthday that I entered the classroom as a teacher for the first time. For reasons that need not detain us – it is a story in itself – my teaching career began in earnest in a Swedish gymnasiet; that is, a school intended for students between the ages of 16-19. If you are of the view that Sweden is an anagram of or byword for Utopia you should think again.

It has its share of problems.

Where doesn't? I found myself teaching English to would-be builders, electricians, and car mechanics. Many of my students were boys; they were mostly good lads, but almost without exception they were little interested in learning English. In their apathy, at least, I could recognize an earlier version of myself. In these early days, I made many mistakes and I sometimes wonder that I did not, once and for all, throw in the towel. However, reasonably quickly, I learned that I was not so much teaching a subject, but rather teaching people and, fortified by this strikingly obvious insight, my lot slowly improved. It helped too that I liked Sweden. Sweden has little time for hierarchy – not in an immediately obvious sense – and this is reflected in a general animus for private education. On the whole, Sweden is laid back. This is apparent in the understated dress code of most workplaces. You are expected to 'dress casual'. One principal teacher I knew looked rather like Che Guevara after several seasons in a jungle hideout, but his sartorial



inelegance did not prevent him from being an outstanding principal. Other things appealed to me. For example, Swedes did not ask me which schools and universities I had attended, students and teachers of all ages are on first name terms, and (at least while speaking English) my accent was not used as a shortcut to ascertaining my class background. All of this seemed a world away from the Britain I had left behind, hypersensitive then and now to status and class.

Although my early classroom experiences were with students who would go on, quite literally, to build and maintain society, I had been recruited to the school to teach on the embryonic International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma programme. It was love at first sight and despite its ups and downs it is a love that has never left me. The IB's mission statement, which "aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect," seems so utterly commonsensical,

If you are working-class, you know it, both in your material condition and in the social attitudes that you typically develop and carry.

and working with this unflinchingly audacious ambition provided my teaching with a clear framework from which I could work. I moved from job to vocation. Over the 10 years that followed, with the exception of a couple where I lectured in universities, I taught English, Theory of Knowledge, and Social and Cultural Anthropology, all part of the IB programme, and it was wonderful.

And then I made a transition to teaching in international schools and away from Sweden. The move had been brewing for some time. In Sweden, I didn't teach in an international school. Our students came from most sections of Swedish society, and we had a few students from other countries. But the school was a Swedish school, first and foremost, and the majority of students were Swedish. I had reached a point in my career where I was ambitious – for what exactly I'm uncertain – and Sweden offered too few opportunities for the ambitious IB teacher. I had also attended international conferences with other IB teachers who taught in schools called '(insert your exotic capital city of choice) International School' and I knew I had to join them. It was a siren call.

In all of the international schools I taught in, each offered an excellent period of initial induction to new teachers and staff. The word 'induction' has a number of possible connotations – not all innocuous

– but the intention of each school was sincere. There were sessions on all sorts of things ranging from understanding the timetable, to reporting, to supervising co-curricular activities, to doing your banking, to negotiating the local culture. There was, however, no session on the culture shock of teaching in elite international schools for teachers from working class backgrounds.

I don't want to be drawn into a pointless sociological discussion of what working-class means exactly. If you are working-class, you know it, both in your material condition and in the social attitudes that you typically develop and carry. Moreover, I don't claim to be working-class. My material wealth, at least, would suggest otherwise. I do, however, assert to having a working-class background, and this brings with it certain quasi-ingrained beliefs and attitudes that served me well enough when teaching in a state school in Sweden, but did not prepare or equip me for life in international schools.

I know well enough that I ought to tread carefully in what I now write, and I don't want to be the guy who throws mud after the fact. That's puerile. Besides, the international schools I worked in were excellent in many ways, with good colleagues, frequently fantastic students, supportive parents, and – if you are at all interested – excellent pay. There is, nevertheless, a discourse or system of beliefs and a concomitant way of behaving in international schools – fee-paying and private, whether for-profit or not – that working-class teachers must learn to negotiate, or move on. This struck me rather early in my sojourn where the question of where you were schooled and just how many postgraduate degrees you possessed became a topic for

not infrequent nor wholly innocent discussion. Hence, in a moment of incipient imposter syndrome, I learned in apparently casual conversation that the colleagues in my office cluster had attended Oxford, Cambridge, and Harvard. Gulp!

Back in Sweden, the alma mater of colleagues would have been unknown and irrelevant. Class-based elitism did not dominate my international school experience in an everyday sense, but it existed as a palimpsest that would occasionally flicker into view. In discussions of 'good schools', I came to hear more than once that good schools did not so much have qualities, but rather names. Most could be found in England or sometimes New England and cost lots of money to attend.

Then there was the overheard conversation of two senior-management colleagues where accents – “the ones that parents want teachers to have”, that is – were ranked. As a Scotsman, I didn't do particularly well, but was higher placed than some Indian colleagues. Talking of parents, they too, it will not surprise you, represented a particular challenge in the international school context. Most parents were perfectly reasonable, wanting only the best for their children. However, the transactional nature of fee-paying international schools was not infrequently brought to my attention:

“You know who pays your salary, don't you?” In other regards too, parents wanted a say: “You're studying advertising, I hear. When will you be studying Shakespeare?” Quite right: Why have trendy mediocrity when you can buy serious cultural capital?

The thing that most struck me in all of the international schools where I taught was the

diversity of students. It was, for me, a great success that Indians and Pakistanis, Jews and Arabs, white and black could all mutually and peacefully coexist. It seemed a large stride towards making the world a better and more peaceful place.

But the more I looked at this apparent success, the less certain I became. Most teachers, for one thing, were, like me, white, coming from Europe, North America, and Australasia in the main. This didn't reflect the diversity of nationalities among students. And, while the students were diverse in ethnicity and nationality, they were, with a few (sometimes significant) exceptions, homogeneously wealthy.

In supervising one group of students over many weeks engaged in 'service', I became interested in what was discussed and what went unsaid. Specifically, raising money was the main focus of the group, money that was to be used to support schooling in a far flung, mainly rural and economically impoverished country.

The initiative almost certainly improved lives, but I was mostly struck by how the discussion would oscillate between the task of raising money and more mundane concerns such as plans for the weekend, overseas holidays, shopping for clothes, and so on. The actual recipients of the money were hardly discussed. The global economic system that supports and maintains inequality, of which international schools are surely a part, was never mentioned, not by the students, nor by me. Anand Giridharadas in his 2018 book, *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*, writes at length about this phenomenon that I witnessed and, frankly,

participated in firsthand; that is, doing good without confronting the system that in itself contributes to a globally growing imbalance of wealth and power. I offer no excuse for my own muted response (and other silences) except to say that the dominant ideology of an institution that exists, in part, to maintain privilege and advantage did not permit genuine criticism. Woe betide the teacher on a two-year contract with a family to support who spots an elephant in the room and gives it a name. For the working-class teacher, to do so would simply confirm the chip on his shoulder.

I do not blame the young students I taught in international schools for their relative advantage. The overwhelming majority were very decent, polite, caring, and engaging. My own children attended international schools – that is, the ones I taught in – and emerged, I'd like to think, with good educations (and 'posh' accents). But some of the kids I worked with understood their privilege only too well. As one colleague – a working-class kindred spirit – quietly remarked, "they may as well have butlers". Sadly, and more than once, I overheard the phrase "middle-income father" used as a disparaging insult. It made me mad.

It is sometimes claimed that part of what makes someone working-class is a deep distrust of other, higher classes. There is, I think, something in this. My own experience of working in international schools gave me the opportunity to see, up close, how the other half live. I can only say that people are people, and those who are materially successful tend to work tremendously hard. On the other hand, international schools are part of the problem that underpins and furthers

inequality globally. This seems obvious, although it is, to be fair, a mainly unintended outcome. Less obvious, almost hidden away, are the lives of teachers, particularly the teachers whose backgrounds, like my own, do not prepare them to slip seamlessly into hyper-affluent international school communities. It may be bold – inductively fallacious, even – to extrapolate from my own admittedly limited experience to sweepingly broad claims about international schools everywhere. Perhaps. But others, in surreptitious conversation, have confirmed my experience and sentiment.

I doubt *Working-Class Teacher* will ever be written. Not by me. I would not in any case rather be without my experience in international schools; I learned so much. For the record, I am back living and working in Sweden. I teach in a state school where the IB programme is offered, my students are wonderful all sorts, and my colleagues, in their jeans and t-shirts, are fabulous. It's a full circle of sorts, and I feel more able to appreciate it, enriched by my sojourn elsewhere.

David McIntyre has been teaching the IB Diploma since the 1990s. In that time, he has taught English in groups 1 and 2, Social and Cultural Anthropology in group 3, and Theory of Knowledge. He has taught in schools and universities in Sweden, Singapore, and Thailand, and has led many IB workshops in Europe, and Asia-Pacific. He has written extensively about teaching English A: Language and Literature. His teaching is guided by a strong desire to promote an understanding of language, and to stimulate self-awareness and critical thinking as a vehicle for positive social change." He can be reached at davidimcintyre1@gmail.com.

AP Language and Composition Teacher Brings International Insight

By *Ellen Mangiamele, William T. Dwyer High School,
Palm Beach Gardens, Florida*

For the past five years, I have been contemplating retirement. There are so many things I want to do: start that organic garden, take up yoga seriously, spend quality time with the grandchildren, get back into distance cycling and read all the novels my friends read for their book clubs instead of the rereading novels I will be teaching during the school year. But when it comes time to pull the plug and sign the papers, the reality of how much I still love what I do stops me.

Even with all the Covid-craziness involving asynchronous, synchronous and face-to-face classes, hybrid teaching strategies, online-only professional development, Zoom Conferences and Google Meetings, I begin another year excited about meeting a new group of AP Lang students and sharing ideas with colleagues in Florida.

Since 1981, I have been teaching while raising a family and relocating regularly. Obviously, it presents its fair share of obstacles.

The daily balancing act between domestic and teaching responsibilities is a juggling act. I am constantly reprioritizing: laundry or lesson plans, groceries or grading, cleaning or conferences, dinner or not? Then, just to amp things up a bit, my husband would sometimes get transferred and relocating would be thrown into the mix. No problem. Let's pack up the whole family and move overseas every few years. Luckily, he's married to someone who embraces the challenges that each new culture offers. Sure, it isn't easy learning to drive in downtown Rome or even on the left side of the road in England. It also isn't easy adjusting to the metric system of measurements. And it definitely isn't easy getting even a basic grip on the German language. But what makes these little bumps in the road all worth it are the experiences and memories.



Teaching AP Language and Composition both domestically and internationally offers a rich variety for teaching rhetoric. The course offers students the ability to learn the methods that writers use to achieve their intended effects on readers. Students develop an understanding of how writers can adapt to different purposes, audiences and contexts by reading, analyzing and writing three free-response essays. The essays focus on synthesis, argument and rhetorical analysis. There is also a 45-question multiple choice section.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of this course is that it allows teachers autonomy with literary selections. Although we are encouraged to maintain a focus on nonfiction, there are still options for including fictional pieces. In New York, it was fun to capitalize on our location and combine F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* with excerpts from Lucy Moore's *Anything Goes: A Biography of the Roaring Twenties*.

In Germany and Italy, sharing with students Mark Sullivan's story of Pino Lella portrayed in the 2017 novel *Beneath a Scarlet Sky* and

pairing it with World War II political speeches made perfect sense. The horrors of war set against the beauty of the Alps fit naturally with this group of international students. In fact, many of them had even traveled to areas in northern Italy mentioned in Sullivan's novel. In England, it was an absolute joy to

share some of Bill Bryson's travel memoirs that depict his American observations about life in the United Kingdom and then dabble with Shakespeare pieces.

What's the saying? "Do something you love and you'll never work a day in your life." How can engaging with young, enthusiastic readers and writers be considered work? I'm sure there are some other answers to that question but I have been very blessed with all the positions presented my way and I still really love what I do.

Ellen Mangiamele has been teaching since 1981 and she is actively involved with the College Board teaching AP English courses since 2003. Ellen has also been reading and scoring AP Language and Composition exams for seven years. While teaching and raising her children, Ellen and her husband have lived in Rome, Italy; Frankfurt, Germany; Berlin, Germany; and London, England along with New York, Washington D.C., Pennsylvania, Florida and Maryland. She can be reached at ellenmangiamele@gmail.com.

Beyond the Supernatural: Decadent Pedagogy and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*



By Alice Condé and Jessica Gossling, Goldsmiths,
University of London, United Kingdom

'Decadence is like syphilis: you either get it or you don't' (Weir, 2017: p. 219). This quip is a humorous way of introducing decadence to students in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Goldsmiths. Decadence – a multidisciplinary critical concept that relates to anxieties about decline and decay and deals in paradoxes such as beauty and the grotesque, pleasure and pain – is a challenging yet rewarding subject to teach.

It relates to extreme sensations, perverse desires, and a peculiar 'taste for the distasteful' (p. 222). Decadent literature often confronts controversial subject-matter and delves into the darker recesses of the human mind, and it can be daunting to stand in front of a class to present material of this kind.

How will students react? Will they 'get it'? Where to begin charting such a complex terrain whose 'diversity and resistance to

classification' confound even the most established scholars in the field? (Desmarais and Baldick, 2012: p. 7).

This is where Oscar Wilde comes in. A common icebreaker with a new undergraduate class is to ask each student to talk about their favourite book. Without fail, each year at least one person will mention *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It is easy to appreciate the appeal of Wilde's witty epigrams and Dorian as (anti)hero acting out his every desire in an eternally youthful body.

However, while *Dorian Gray* may be a familiar text to some, very few will have considered it in the context of decadence. In fact, while many will recognize the term 'decadence' as it relates to indulgence or hedonism, they are often largely unaware of decadence as an intermittent literary tradition whose most significant flourishing in Britain occurred

in the 1890s, Wilde's heyday. Susan Fiksdal states that the ideal text for stimulating seminar discussion should be 'complex, multi-layered, perhaps controversial, and open to interpretation' (Fiksdal, 2014: p. 27). *Dorian Gray* is thus a good starting-point for introducing literary decadence: we revisit a familiar narrative and tease out significant elements that can be interpreted in new ways from a decadent perspective.

On the surface, *Dorian Gray* is a typical Gothic novel – Dorian, in love with youth, exchanges his soul for a beauty that never fades. As long as his portrait remains intact his face will not show the marks of his depraved lifestyle, but the painting will. By the end of the novel, Dorian's pursuit of pleasure becomes overwhelming and he stabs the painting with a knife, inadvertently killing himself. In popular culture, this classic tale of "the painting in the attic" has become more famous than the novel itself and our students come to the text familiar with this symbolism, expecting to be horrified, perhaps also titillated, and often with a set of expectations related to Victorian ideas of morality. Beneath this surface, however, are more complicated and difficult decadent themes related to art, artifice, and the relationship between beauty and decay. As Wilde warns us in his famous Preface, added after the harsh criticism the novel received when originally published in *Lippincott's Magazine* (1890): 'All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors' (Wilde, 1979: p. 6). Wilde suggests that any controversial ideas that we unearth



are reflections of our own perversities: the decadence we find is of our own making.

A perfect example of this, and one of the reasons why *Dorian Gray* is such a good introduction to decadent writing, is the lengthy description of Dorian's intellectual, aesthetic, and sensory experimentation in Chapter 11. Frequently we have found that students who have read the novel in the past have skipped over this lengthy chapter (it's by far the longest in the novel) as plot-wise it doesn't really add anything. However, what it does provide is a significant example of decadent taste and style in an age 'at once sordid and sensual' (p. 143). It just requires a bit of unpicking and exploration to discover it. Inspired by a book given to him by Lord Henry, 'a novel without a plot and with only one character' (p. 140) that is commonly understood to be the decadent novel *par excellence*, Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À rebours* (*Against Nature*, 1884), Chapter 11 details Dorian's own deep dive into debauchery. Wilde read *À rebours* during his honeymoon in Paris the year it was published, and this chapter provides a microcosm of the channels of influence between French and English decadence in the 1880s and 1890s. Like Des Esseintes in Huysmans's novel, Dorian explores many aspects of decadent

taste – notably, the relationship between private spaces and psychology, a fascination with Catholic aesthetics and Pagan mysticism, and the correspondences that are revealed when we undertake a profound appreciation of perfumes, music, jewels, and art (to name just a few). Unlike the French novel in which each chapter is focused on one of these themes, Wilde presents these decadent ideas in accessible, bite-sized paragraphs. On publication, critics derided the novel for introducing decadence to the broader public. As *The Daily Chronicle* described it, 'It is a tale spawned from the leprous literature of the French Decadents – a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction' (Anon., 1890: p. 368). In our teaching we use it in the same way. By walking students through this chapter, we are able to provide a decadent amuse-bouche, a taster that precedes our main course.

'Decadence' carries a double meaning: decay and indulgence. It is celebrated by those who 'get it' and regarded as a sign of degeneracy by those who don't. Passages of *Dorian Gray* were read out at Wilde's 1895 trial for gross indecency as supposed proof of his homosexuality. Yet, as Wilde pointed out, 'What Dorian Gray's sins are no one knows. He who finds them has brought them' (Wilde, 1890). This lack of explicitness makes *Dorian Gray* an intriguing text that is ideal for introducing notions of decadence to a new audience and encouraging them to actively reflect upon their own responses to suggestions of aesthetic depravity or synaesthetic correspondences. The openness to interpretation offers ample opportunity for classroom discussion and allows students to cultivate their decadent taste before

moving on to more challenging territory such as the poetry of Charles Baudelaire and A. C. Swinburne, or novels by Huysmans and Arthur Machen.

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Balancing Prescriptive and Descriptive Approaches to Teaching Academic Writing in a Japanese University



By R. Paul Lege, PhD, Nagoya University, Chikusa-ku, Japan

I have been teaching academic writing in Japanese universities for more than twenty-odd years. During this period, I have attended numerous language conferences both in the West and in Asia and have noticed an interesting phenomenon concerning presentations involved with writing instruction for ESL learners. Perhaps reflecting the cultural divide, many non-native English-speaking presenters tend to discuss approaches to writing instruction that involve the explicit teaching of prescriptive grammar. Prescriptive grammar prescribes rules for how language ought to be used by its speakers. In contrast, native English-speaking presenters tend to offer approaches to writing instruction in which grammar is addressed, not as a prescribed set of rules, but as a means for communicating a message.

The focus here is on descriptive grammar, which describes how language is actually used by the people who speak it.

In many of the Asian conferences that I have attended, the lectures on prescriptive approaches to teaching grammar and writing are often far better-attended than lectures on other approaches to writing instruction given by native speakers. This circumstance is easily explainable. Much language instruction in Asia, not just writing but all aspects of communication, is still painfully taught using the grammar translation method due to the demands of institutional exams. Ironically, in the West, such methods are viewed as antiquated, or even imperialistic, and have been abandoned.

Though these two approaches are distinct, I do not feel that they conflict with each other.

I am not advocating for the grammar translation method but I am stating that aspects of the prescriptive approach may be necessary depending on the context (Muneeba, 2017).

By prescriptive, here, I mean directing students to their writing problems and giving them immediate feedback (often at the micro-level). This approach is in contrast to the descriptive approach, which is more inductive and requires students to elaborate on the ideas in their writing (often at the macro-level). Though these two approaches are distinct, I do not feel that they conflict with each other. Rather, when designing a writing course, using both approaches should be measured in appropriate amounts to meet the needs of the learners in a given environment. Whether teaching writing in general or academic writing, few classroom situations are so monochrome that only one approach should be applied.

I do fully understand and appreciate the importance of the descriptive approach when teaching students who are fluent in English, and I do incorporate aspects of this approach with my ESL learners. However, I know for a fact that in the United States, at least, this approach is primarily aimed at more intermediate and advanced writers.

While students fluent in English may have less need for micro-level instruction or assistance, this is simply not the case in ESL learning environments (Ferris, 1999). Regardless of the level of fluency, and even at the most fundamental level, grammar can affect meaning and meaning can affect grammar, so some instruction of prescriptive grammar is necessary in every ESL context.

In many ways, I am further in the hinterlands of ESL writing instruction than what is often presented in the literature regarding the relationship between L2 learners and their native-speaking faculty. In my case, I must design my course to meet the immediate needs of ESL students coming from outside of Japan and who are attempting to address the expectations of Japanese faculty (who may or may not be experienced with the English language). Many of these students have little writing experience (sometimes not even in their own language), and I must design 36 hours of instruction that covers what students need to know in order to write a sophisticated thesis or dissertation within a two- to three-year time frame.

As such, my courses are designed to cater to the immediate needs of the students and the expectations of the faculty who demand clarity, coherence, and consistency in students' writing. Fortunately, my students are highly motivated so much of my design can focus on improving skills and habits that are the result of their limited experience with the language. I balance the prescriptive and descriptive approaches because most students lack experience,

some lack confidence, and some have a lot of interest in both micro- and macro-level issues.

Essentially, then, this choice has meant dividing my course into three general areas of writing development: form (grammar, syntax), function (organization), and elaboration (process).

The form element represents about 15 to 25 percent of the design and is meant to be fluid to deal with the demands of the faculty (for example, avoiding the passive so that the subject in a sentence is clear) and the interests of the students. The function element is more genre-based because this deals with ensuring that there is strong coherence between paragraphs, sections, and chapters of a thesis or dissertation. Finally, the elaboration element is designed to assist students with comprehending what should go into their work; that is, learning to move concisely from research to writing (Nation, 2009).

None of the above may be particularly novel or radical in the West, but when first adopted for the program in our department, it was viewed as quite a departure from past approaches. More importantly, the learning outcomes have improved. Students are writing better and the faculty is more satisfied. This success does not mean that we do not have room for improvement.

Rather than advocating for one way (whether it is using technology, pedagogy, or content), educators should mix and

experiment with approaches. While there may be better ways, there is no single way to design a class. Since the classroom environment can be different within one institution, we should not expect that students' learning needs would be the same given the differences in individuals. While an educator somewhere may have a successful class using either the prescriptive or descriptive approach exclusively, it cannot be inferred that a mixed design is wrong given the context of the class or the needs of the students.

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“I have traveled extensively in Concord”: Using Student Biography, Family History, and Genealogy In the English Classroom



By Robert A. Liftig, EdD,
Westport, Connecticut

The world is on the move again...and most of the emigrants and immigrants are coming to English speaking countries.

Henry David Thoreau’s famous comment about rarely leaving Massachusetts applies to today’s teachers, as well as their students. These days it is more important than ever for teachers and students to know exactly who is in their classrooms.

Factoids:

1. “The number of international migrants is expected to surpass 250 million this year [2020], an all-time high, as people search for economic opportunity. And, fast growing developing countries have increasingly become a strong magnet for people from other parts of the developing world.” (world bank.org)
2. “53 percent of immigrants to North America came from Latin America (Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean) [between 2010 and 2020]... In terms of sending the most immigrants, Mexico, India, China, the Philippines, El Salvador, and Guatemala sent the most during the decade.” (un.org)
3. “The following countries have received the most immigrants:
 - #5. United Kingdom. 10 million immigrants. 3.7% of the total world’s migrant population.
 - #4. Russia. 12 million immigrants. ...
 - #3. Saudi Arabia. 13 million immigrants. ...
 - #2. Germany. 13 million immigrants. ...
 - #1. United States of America. 51 million immigrants.” (citizenpath.com)



The author's family: great-grandfather and great-grandmother seated. Grandmother, far right.

I have been a high school English teacher and college professor for more than 50 years. I began teaching on a Caribbean Island when I was in the Peace Corps; “settled down,” taught high school for more than 30 years in suburban New York, logged 40 years at a Connecticut university, 15 years in a local community college, and have also wandered the halls of eight other schools for just about enough to pay for my gas to get there.

So, how do I know much of anything about international education?

Easy.

Many times in my teaching career, my classroom looked like the barroom scene from

Star Wars. Every classroom I taught in had students who were from almost everywhere else. Like Thoreau, “I have traveled extensively in Concord,” without leaving New England for very long.

And so have you, even if you had to move out of your country to find your classroom.

I often taught in the usual ways: blathering on and on about Complex Sentences, the wonders of the Five Paragraph Essay, the Best Quotes From *Hamlet*, and assigning the biography, *A Separate Peace*, which they almost never read because it had no pictures in it; but I also knew that I was teaching students first and subject matter second.

I was always curious; I was even “nosy” sometimes. And I always felt sorry for the kids with accents nobody – even me – could understand, and whose parents had chosen to raise them on the edge of the Bronx, or in the grassy and beautiful hills of Fairfield County, Connecticut, or in our forgettable cities.

Among the many immigrants passing through my high school classroom were:

- An Iranian boy who turned up at the height of the hostage crisis, and who had “Ayatollah #1” written – probably by a pranking American student, but I’m not sure – across the back of his notebook.
- Another Iranian boy who told me he had to step over the bodies of his uncles, aunts, and cousins to run away from his house, which the same Ayatollah had set on fire.
- A Bosnian boy who had been bombed by NATO, and had been sent to New York to be raised by his aunt. It took three months for him to speak anything resembling English: His first full sentence was: “Yo! Bro! S’up?” and he kept saying that to everybody, he was so proud of himself.

Passing through my community college and university classrooms were:

- Haitian kids who wanted to tell me what grifters the Clintons were when they came to Haiti with their Foundation to “help” after the Earthquake; and how they had seen the top of their favorite mountain near Port Au Prince disappear after Hillary’s late brother secured the only silver mining contract in Haiti: He then blew the top off their favorite mountain.
- The Ukrainian priest who came to Connecticut to serve the Ukrainian community here, fell in love with a lady in his congregation, quit and got married to her, and complained to me that his church was now blocking him from getting his Green Card. He told me he might have to have his rich Ukrainian relatives send a pile of money so he could BUY his Green Card. I laughed and told him that was impossible here. This isn’t Ukraine. Then he gave me the web address he was using. “Yep. For the right price, you can!”
- An Indian man who had been a dentist for years, but who was told by US authorities



The author’s grandfather in primary school in New Britain, Connecticut in 1895. His grandfather said the teacher said she was going to make “Little Americans out of us. And she did.”

he would have to go to college again – not just dental school. I wanted to introduce him to the sweet young woman from Thailand whose English was always whispered and anyway unintelligible. She had been a nurse in Thailand and though we desperately needed nurses here, she too had been told to begin her certification by taking my English 101 class. Which, in her case, wasn't a bad idea.

- The Dutch au pair who arrived petite in September, had beefed up considerably by Thanksgiving, and was positively obese by the end of the semester; and who said her doctors in Holland had warned her that the food in the United States was poison, and who also swore that what she ate and how much she ate had not changed a bit between there and here.

I had and have no idea at all whether what they were telling me was true. It's not easy being an immigrant.

I know.

My great-grandparents were born in Russia, and my great-grandfather used to show off his becoming American by reading the local paper each morning so his family would be proud of him. One day my mother tried to read his paper over his shoulder. He was holding it upside down!

But my great grandfather's kids became doctors and lawyers, and his grandchildren followed in their fathers' footsteps, and now, here I am, a college professor with a doctorate from Columbia, teaching immigrants – and

writing about a few of them – who mostly and probably came to their new countries with chips on their shoulders, and some interesting stories to tell, but nobody – or almost nobody — in their school systems wants to hear them.

I began experimenting with family biography when my ninth grade English classes were reading *Night*, and, at the same time, studying World War II in History. I called the project I designed, "Where Were You In World War II?" and had my students ask their grandparents or neighbors for interviews – and also asked them to record or transcribe what they heard, if possible. They gave oral reports, and then wrote essays; the project won an Award for Excellence In Teaching, which is still posted on the Internet.

Brief Results:

- An Italian grandfather had fought for Italy, and his granddaughter brought in his wartime picture – in a Nazi uniform!
- A Japanese girl's grandfather had been teaching in Nagasaki when the A-bomb was dropped. He saw the flash and then yelled at his class to duck and cover.
- A Polish girl's grandfather won medals for trying to save Warsaw Ghetto Jews — when no one else would. He offered to speak to my class when he got back from what turned out to be his last trip to Poland – or to anywhere.

This list, as all these lists, could go on and on.

The stories are fascinating; most of what you will hear has never been heard or recorded before, and, when wrapped around a common topic, preferably one meant to be covered in your curriculum, a sense of shared purpose is formed – as well as a small community of kids who find out they have something in common.

Another result of my project, which I repeated until the Greatest Generation faded from view, was an oral report given by an Italian-American girl, whose grandfather had served in the US Army. There was an Italian exchange student in the class – not the most pleasant kid. When the girl gave her grandfather's last name, the exchange student shouted "You Jew! Not Italian!" Sometimes these things happen in classrooms too.

As I headed for him while this fire was still in its smoking stage, the girl giving the report said, "That's OK! This is very important!" And the Italian exchange student proceeded to offer his take on the Jews of Italy who have been there for 2,000 years, but who still kept sacred certain surnames – like the grandfather's — and he knew them all, for some reason. I was really going to come down hard on this student, until the girl giving her report said, "My uncle has got this disease that is only found in Jews, and the doctors asked us what our background was... and we said, 'We've always been Catholic, as far as we know.' This will help my uncle!"

Soon after, I was offered a part-time position teaching a genetics course at a local college (I had been pre-med for three years, then switched to English, but had taught biology in the Peace Corps). This was the year the

National Geographic Society was conducting its World Genome Project, so I had all my students take the Geographic's DNA test and report on their results. There was a French-Canadian girl in the class, whose mother and she had just been diagnosed with thyroid cancer. The doctors asked for a family history; but her grandmother from Nova Scotia had been adopted. The grandmother, her test showed, was a Mi' Maw Indian, and the condition was so common among the natives in Nova Scotia that the medical school in Halifax was studying it. She thanked me very much, and the doctors here got in touch with the doctors there, and mother and daughter headed to Halifax.

It should be obvious to seasoned teachers that these inquiries can be easily adapted for essay and research writing assignments: original, useful, and memorable.

My third and, I assume, my final English teaching experiment before I hang up my chalk, began after I noticed three familiar last names on my class list. "Seward," Webster," and "Forrestal." When I asked the girls if they were related to anyone famous, Seward said, "We live in his house. But the only picture we have is him standing next to some tall guy with a beard and a funny hat. I'll bring it in." The Webster girl said, "Yeah. I think he wrote some kind of booky-thingy." And the Forrestal girl said, "My great-grandfather liked boats." For those who may not know, Seward was President Lincoln's Secretary of State, and Lincoln was the guy with the funny hat; Webster wrote the first American dictionary; and Forrestal was one of our greatest admirals — he has an aircraft carrier named after him.

With the advent of DNA testing, and with extensive genealogies now being posted on the Internet (eg. geni.com), all sorts of interesting family information is available that, before the Internet, few families knew much about. This is ALL fodder for inquiry in any English course that deals with biography.

I give my wife as an example: Born in the hills of Kentucky, she was always told she was "Scots-Irish," like everyone else in her county, and like all the textbooks said "her people" were. I hit the Internet a few years ago and published a 1,000 page book called Family Matters. Here are some of my wife's ancestors:

1. Macduff
2. Brian Boru – King of Ireland
3. Daniel Boone's brother
4. Thomas Jefferson's sister
5. Washington's grandfather
6. Pocahontas
7. The leader of the Pilgrims who missed the Mayflower but caught up with the other Pilgrims later
8. Governors of Virginia and Connecticut
9. Founders of Jamestown
10. Founders of Springfield, Watertown, Ipswich, and Barnstable Massachusetts; Founders of Hartford, Wethersfield, Middletown, and Fairfield, in Connecticut – where we live.
11. Loyalists who fled to Nova Scotia after the Revolution; Patriots who stood with Washington at Valley Forge; Civil War veterans North and South, etc. etc.

I became more interested in her Loyalist cousins than my wife is in all of them, so I began to write about the Loyalists. I am now the Feature Editor of the Canadian Loyalist Gazette, most of whose members descend from ancestors thrown out of Connecticut by the Revolutionaries, and who were sent as refugees to Canada by King George III. We have streets named after them here in Fairfield but, I suppose, only after the family members who were rebels.

All the kids you teach have stories to tell, or thousands of stories, if they only knew about them. We really don't need A Separate Peace anymore: every student can be his or her own biographer.

Dr. Robert Liftig was raised in Northern Connecticut. He holds a BA in English Literature from the University of Maryland, an MA in English and American Lit from Conn. State University, and an MEd and EdD in English Ed from Columbia. He taught high school English for 32 years in Westchester, NY, and has taught for 40 years at Fairfield University. He is very very old - so old that he has been able to have written and published 5 novels, hundreds of essays, a barrel of test preparation handbooks, and is currently a Feature Writer for the Canadian Loyalist Gazette. On days when he is not a writer or teacher or thinking about retiring to his log cabin in Canada, he is a bagpiper for the Fairfield Gaelic American Pipes and Drums. He can be reached at boblif@aol.com.

And we are off...

International schools begin early recruitment for the 2022 school year



By **Peter Smyth**, *Search Associates,*
Surrey, United Kingdom

It's the start of a new school year. New classes, new students and for some, possibly a new school. All extremely exciting. With so much to occupy us in the here and now, it seems crazy to be thinking about applying for positions for the next school year beginning in August 2022 — but the recruitment cycle has begun...

This fact seems unbelievable, but it's true. International schools are now starting to fill positions for the August 2022 school year. This is an especially important piece of information to be aware of for those looking to work overseas next year. Schools will continue to post positions throughout this school year, but the fact is that many international schools will conduct a lot of their hiring early in the first semester — before the end of this calendar year- and some have already started.

I can say, based on the volume of email regarding reactivating employment profiles

in late August, those teachers do seem eager to move on from their current positions, and as a result we do anticipate that the job market will be strong in the upcoming year. Many teachers have been stuck in a country for two years, unable to leave due to COVID restrictions, and moving on from their current position is a necessity so they can see their families. There very well could be far greater movement of teachers this year than in the past.

South East Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East all remain quite popular regions for candidates to secure positions. While positions may exist globally the limiting factor in the upcoming recruitment cycle will be the ability to travel to a certain country: Flights, visas, quarantines, vaccine requirements and border restrictions are constantly changing the process of securing a position. The job search certainly will not get any easier.

Traditionally the bulk of hiring occurs in January and February, but it pays to be aware of the market and to position yourself so that if that dream job does appear, you are ready and able to apply. If you really are intent on securing a position in an international school, then it is wise to be aware of positions being posted, have all your professional materials in order and have the mental mind-set to apply.

By professional materials, I refer to documents such as your CV, philosophy statement, current references, background checks and, possibly, portfolio of work. All of these items should be accurate and reflect exactly what position you hold and what school you are in here and now.

Your referees should be aware of your intentions (even if you may end up staying another year at the school), with one of them ideally being the Head of School (in line with current best practices as outlined by the International Taskforce on Child Protection safer recruiting guidelines).

There are numerous platforms out there, like Search Associates, which list jobs at international schools, but always be sure to do your own homework. Be sure to research a country and school you are potentially interested in applying to yourself – do not rely on someone else's word.



With all your materials in order, this marks the start of an exciting journey in finding a new position. Your new school year may have just started, but so has the process of finding a position for the following school year – exciting stuff!

***Peter Smyth** is a Senior Associate at Search Associates UK South including the areas of London, the South East, the South West, the East of England, and the West Midlands in the United Kingdom. He has taught in international schools in the US, Middle East, Panama and started his teaching journey in the UK. He can be reached at psmyth@searchassociates.com.*

Watching Wilson: The Ineffable Expertise of Teachers



By Wayne Furlong, Hong Kong

"Thanks for taking my call, Dr Ng. I'm Wilson Cheung's English teacher. His mother gave me your number."

"Oh, yes. She told me you might call. I'll get straight down to it. Wilson has Asperger's Syndrome. In his particular case, one thing that really stops him concentrating is eye contact. Can I give you a couple of tips?"

"Yes please."

"Okay. First, when talking to the class, stand directly in front of Wilson so that you are looking over his head at everyone else. Second, when talking to Wilson one-to-one, place an object that you can talk about, such as his work, on the table, so you can both look at that."

When a teacher walks into a classroom, society does not walk in with her. The room will be free of parents, principals, academics

and fulminating shock jocks. What the teacher does in that room is up to her. She is, good or bad, a practitioner in a world full of theorists.

But she is a practitioner in an uncertain place, a place that constantly changes. She has never met anyone like Wilson before.

Buddha warned us of course that nothing is permanent. Education changes constantly, often accompanied by resistance and debate. In these debates academics who have studied learning rightly have a voice. So too, less rightly, do journalists, billionaires, politicians, lobbyists, bean counters and think tanks.

Strangely, teachers often have a very small voice in these debates. Students mostly have no voice at all. But make no mistake, the success of any change or non-change is entirely dependent on these two groups. Professor John Hattie's meta-analysis of 256 learning factors found that nothing

helps learning more than a teacher who understands their impact and a student who understands their learning.

We need to hear the voices of teachers and students.

When teachers and students have voices, they talk in stories. Staffrooms are full of stories about hilarious moments in the morning class, about a student who is struggling, or flying, about an activity that engaged students or one that bored them witless. These stories tell the teacher that sometimes they don't know exactly how to help a particular class or student. Sometimes teachers doubt that they are experts at all.

However, Hattie points the teacher in the exact opposite direction. The teacher needs to understand how they have an impact and that means that when they are not having the impact they want, they need to see it. In fact, only they can see it. Noam Chomsky may be the world's most famous Linguistics expert, but he knows nothing about Wilson Cheung.

Imagine what it is like for Wilson when the teacher says, "Look at me when I'm talking to you." Preconceptions such as "not looking at me when I am explaining something is rude" must be let go of. Constantly. Forget Hattie and think Buddha or even Socrates—the unexamined day's teaching is not worth teaching, or something like that. Good teachers watch what happens in their classroom with as open a mind as they can. That means they see errors.

There is a terrible tendency in the modern world to mythologise competence and excellence, as if they are static things.



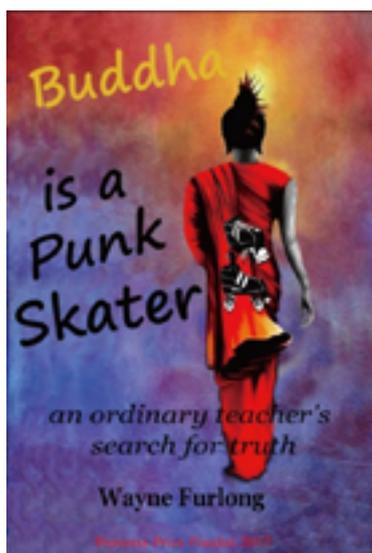
May I remind you that Paul McCartney wrote both "Hey Jude" and "Wonderful Christmas Time." Like good song writers, good teachers are not always competent.

That is why I wrote "Buddha is a Punk Skater", a collection of stories of my own error-riddled teaching career.

I am not a Buddhist so why this title?

You have possibly heard the Buddhist idea that we are all Buddha or have Buddha-nature. You have probably heard the Buddhist aphorism that the people who confound us are our best teachers. If not, you have now. Buddha was, in the end, a teacher himself. Buddhism is of Asian origin and my career included a couple of decades in Melbourne and one in Hong Kong. I threw all those ideas into the title of a story about a girl playing truant in Melbourne in the 1980s. I did this partly because a skating rink is a ridiculous setting for a story of enlightenment and partly because it isn't.

I hope young teachers read my book, if only to learn that this job can be pretty funny and often the funniest thing is your own ineptitude. It certainly makes for the best staffroom stories. Relax. There is no such thing as teacher-of-the-year. There is at best teacher-



of-the-moment and that will sometimes be you. But watch what happens in the next moment.

I think teaching is a wonderful and meaningful job, but I don't think it's special. The things that make a good teacher are the same things that make a good anything- curiosity,

the self-confidence to see your mistakes, a sense of humour, work, questioning, kindness, knowing that you get another crack tomorrow.

The doorway to all of these things is watching, observing, listening to those we encounter in our daily work. The educational theorists I learned most from, Frank Smith on literacy, and Professor John Hattie on the keys to successful learning, would have meant nothing to me without the punk skater. Without her, they have no context. Also, she already told me that what they had discovered was true.

Teachers, like everyone else, cross paths with humour, grief, music, conflict, varying kinds of ableness, race, gender, culture, drugs, crime and even violence. They encounter successful people and people who are struggling to cope. Sometimes they are the same people. Sometimes they are you.

Some days the teacher you think is the worst is doing a better job than you are.

You do not want to miss any of it.

Be watchful. Just don't make eye contact with Wilson.

Wayne Furlong has been a teacher since the 1970's, first in Melbourne and then in Hong Kong. His first book, Buddha is a Punk Skater, was published by Proverse Publishing in 2018. It is a collection of quirky, sometimes funny, stories from his teaching life. Wayne wrote the book to entertain but also to put into the education debate the often ignored truth that teaching, like life, is messy. To cope with that messiness requires an open mind, a sense of humour and the confidence to know everyone gets it wrong sometimes. He can be reached at waynedfurlong@gmail.com.



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