

TEXAS VOICES

A NEWSLETTER OF THE TEXAS COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

President's corner

By Charles Moore, TCTELA President

Remembering Roni

Many of our members may know of the recent passing of Dr. Roni Dean-Burren. We know the sadness brought on by the loss of someone so brilliant and bold. We also know the joy we feel when we gather together to celebrate someone's life. Roni was uplifting and inspirational. A few Saturdays back, I, along with several TCTELA board members, past and present, attended Roni's celebration service to honor her, her loved ones, and her legacy.

This is what I saw:

Love. That church and the gathering of people within it poured over with love. I truly believe that every person in the room who knew Roni personally loved her and felt loved by her. One of her many superpowers was bringing people together, and that gift was on display that day. The ceremony began with the processional and a prayer but abruptly upshifted to an expression of joy, honoring her life, connecting all of us together in celebration. The proceeding program spoke the words of her heart. I have to believe that everyone left feeling Roni's love.

Inspiration. My connection with Roni, beyond our TCTELA paths, was through our shared experience as coaches. On more than one occasion, she served as a coach for me as I ventured into new territories as an instructional and curricular leader. I heard that sentiment reflected in many of the speakers which led me to believe I was one of many upon whom she had bestowed her wisdom. She had an amazing ability to listen to someone, process their needs, and respond directly to their situation with empathy and grace.

Leadership. Several speakers reminded us of her outspoken nature, her boldness, along with her drive to advocate for those whom her voice could support. Roni's contribution to TCTELA is difficult to fully realize. She modeled leadership in her actions, and her exigence oozed empathy, something she expected from those in any of her many circles. She stood up for what she



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believed would be best for students and teachers. Her boldness was infectious, daring those around her to step into their confidence and deliver to their highest level of performance.

Family. Roni's celebration felt like the coming together of many huge families. I reunited with people that I hadn't seen in years and some I see almost weekly. Smiles and hugs along with warm greetings brought these families together, including our TCTELA family, of which Roni was an important part. Board members from across the state, some local, some from far and wide, made their way to Pearland for the service.

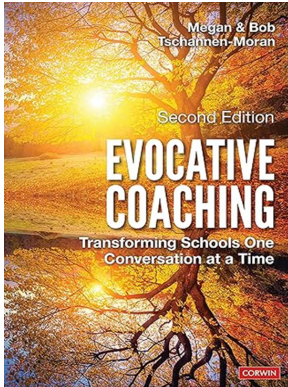
This is what I see happening next:

At the next annual conference, we will unveil a newly created award. Roni and I bounced around the idea for this award last year, and it will finally be bestowed for the first time. It is an award recognizing campus or district leaders who support the work of literacy across our state. It is my honor to share with you that our newly created award for literacy leadership will be named the Dr. Roni Dean-Burren Literacy Leader award.

I look forward to seeing you this spring at the TCTELA conference in Round Rock, TX. Please join us to carry on the work of Dr. Roni Dean-Burren and all of those who have dedicated their life to literacy and to readers and writers.

Evocative coaching: Stories lead to possibilities

By Amanda Palmer, Past President Emeritus



The field of instructional coaching is growing. This model of professional development originated in the 1980s and has grown with the work of leaders such as Dr. Jim Knight, Elena Aguilar, and Michael Bungay Stanier. Many districts and a significant number of campuses currently have instructional coaches on staff.

The reason instructional coaches are being hired is obvious. Teachers need and want the just-in-time professional learning that instructional coaches provide. While teachers and instructional coaches want this, the challenges and boundaries that accompany the social dynamics make building these relationships difficult. Implementation has been a challenge.

Evocative Coaching: Transforming Schools One Conversation at a Time by Megan & Bob Tschannen-Moran (2020) addresses this challenge in a slightly different manner than other leaders in the field. Their solution is particularly appealing to those from a language arts background who understand the brain's natural craving for narrative that Tom Newkirk explains in *Minds Made for Stories* (2014). Tschannen-Morans' approach advocates for coaches to invite teachers to share their stories around education; then by listening closely, appreciating the teacher's personal strengths, and learning from these stories, they can look for the strengths and potential the teacher could explore for future growth. The Tschannen-Morans explain, "Telling stories is a powerful way for people to make sense of experience. When those experiences are received by an attentive and caring coach with the wisdom to see their potential for personal and professional growth transformation, these stories shift and become powerful catalysts for change" (p. 56).

This approach is known by the acronym L.E.A.D: *listen* effectively; *express empathy*; *appreciate* strengths; and *design* thinking. This coaching process begins with an invitation and immediately moves to listening to people's stories as they are "our first and most memorable and meaningful mental constructions" (p. 54). The authors encourage the reader to think of these stories as having three levels: *The Situation*—the context for the story; *The Search*—the quest or conflict; and *The Shift*—the resolution (p. 55). Similar to reading a novel, knowing this plot diagram allows the coach to pay attention to clues regarding the storyteller's values, strengths, and areas they may wish to later explore for personal growth.

As an instructional coach, listening is perhaps the most neglected skill. The authors encourage coaches to lean in and hear each part of the story. Do not attempt to multitask. Do not think about a similar past experience in an effort to connect. Do not consider how the situation could have better been resolved. Be in that moment empathizing with this colleague and noticing their strengths. To empathize is to understand and respect the feelings of another. The Tschannen-Morans describe empathy as being similar to trust in that they are "both a glue that binds people together and a lubricant for change" (p. 76). In essence, empathy, like listening, is a requirement of effective coaching.

Each of these ideas are powerful for coaching, but they are not exclusive to coaching teachers. These same skills could be used with students, coworkers, personal children, and partners. *Evocative Coaching* is written to offer tools and insight into being a more effective instructional coach through positive psychology. However, the guidance offered reaches far beyond the classroom offering value in all aspects of life.

How to evoke stories

Provide a safe environment and ask the right questions. A safe environment without the right questions will often lead to gossip or grumbling. Avoid "How did it go?" Use questions that help teachers reflect on how they've grown, such as, "What has challenged and excited you since the last time we met?"

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Evocative coaching: Stories lead to possibilities (continued)

Invitations to share stories

The right questions are considered an invitation to tell your story. Invitations are open-ended inquiries that put teachers in the driver's seat. *What* and *how* questions generate stories. Avoid *why* questions even though they are also open-ended because they tend to feel judgmental and may lead to resistance.



Tell me a story about*...

- how you became a teacher.
- that illustrates what has been working well for you.
- about a time you handled a tough situation well.
- how your values come through in your teaching.
- a time you tried something new.
- a time when you had a lot of fun in the classroom.

*See page 58 for more story cues and invitations

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Mentorship and community for future teachers of color: A preview of TCTELA's Dream Program and TAFE partnership.

By Dr. Lois Barker, NCTE Liason, and Zainab Jabak, High School Section Chair

In the tapestry of America's public education system, diversity serves as a cornerstone for fostering a rich and inclusive learning environment. Yet, a critical facet of this diversity often remains overlooked—the representation of people of color within the teaching profession. As we strive for educational equity and curricula that reflect the experiences of all students, it becomes increasingly essential to address the underrepresentation of educators from diverse backgrounds in our public schools.

The demographic landscape of our student population is evolving rapidly, with communities becoming more multicultural and ethnically diverse.

Research suggests that children benefit in many ways from having a teacher of the same race or ethnicity. According to research by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there are 49.5 million students in classrooms. 55 percent are students of color and 45 are white. In Texas, Black and Hispanic students comprise roughly 67 percent of the student body. As student diversity increases, teacher diversity has yet to catch up. In Texas, while the overall adult population is people of color, white teachers still make up the most significant portion of the educator workforce at about 60 percent (80 percent nationally). Texas, compared to other states, has a more diverse teaching workforce;



however, much aligned with national trends, Black and brown educators contribute most to high teacher turnover rates.

With a more diverse teaching staff comes unique perspectives and cultural insights. There have been efforts to include more

diverse voices in curricula in the present public school curricula in Texas and across the country; however, this move towards rightful progress has been met with political roadblocks and nationwide book bans and censorship movements. As such, teachers of color are leaving the profession at higher rates than their white counterparts.

We must prioritize recruiting and retaining teachers of color to build a more equitable education system. This idea of recruitment should extend beyond college and begin in high schools. School systems are not solely responsible for starting this recruitment process, but professional and academic organizations are equally important. Once new teachers and future teachers of color are recruited into educational programs and school systems, what will next come to invest in the growth and support of these new and future educators?

In a June 2023 report published by Rand Corp, more Black and Hispanic teachers leave the profession after the first year of teaching than any other group. Black teachers with over five

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Mentorship and community for future teachers of color: A preview of TCTELA's Dream Program and TAFE partnership. (continued)

years in the profession experience higher rates of burnout than their white counterparts. Teachers of color are most recruited for hard-to-staff, economically disadvantaged, and low-performing schools. Black teachers are often tasked as school disciplinarians instead of instructional leaders. Teachers of color are frustrated with the lack of power to change inequities and injustices of school discipline systems, which often target Black and Hispanic students at a much higher rate than their white peers. Teachers of color experience racism and retaliation through a lack of job promotions, opportunities for professional development, and negative performance evaluations in efforts to silence their voices and prevent more collaboration and unison of teachers of color. Because white teachers tend to dominate the teaching field, quite often, new teachers of color have white mentors. While that mentor might be able to help that teacher grow pedagogically, disconnects can still arise. Discussions can become uncomfortable when discussing racism, inequalities, and diversifying curriculum. These negative experiences lead to feelings of isolation and leave teachers of color questioning their place as an educator.

These experiences are not all unfamiliar to pre-service teachers of color. University faculty diversity needs to be improved, much like at the K-12 level. Pre-service teachers of color are also often placed at similarly hard-to-staff schools and often have white mentor teachers. Again, while that mentor teacher might have a firm grasp of content knowledge and classroom management, that teacher might need more sensitivity to issues that impact students and teachers of color. It is essential to point out that some teachers of color enter the teaching field to serve as models and voices for students of color who do not have teachers who look like them and share similar life experiences.

Decades and decades of research on teacher retention, particularly the retention of teachers of color, reveal that mentorship programs are crucial to attracting and retaining teachers of color. While ensuring mentees have opportunities to explore and develop their educator voice through a deeper understanding of pedagogy, instructional frameworks, and classroom management, these mentorship programs should be centered on equity and social justice issues. It is hard to isolate issues of race, injustice, and equity from the daily functions of teaching; as such, individuals designing and facilitating mentorship programs must be steeped in the issues that impact teachers and students of color and equity and social justice frameworks and pedagogies. In a research brief published by the Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions, 89 percent of students who participated in the Teacher Education program at Huston-Tillotson believed that having a mentor from a similar racial or cultural background would enhance their confidence and provide more significant support. They thought, as pre-service teachers, they would feel more comfortable and would be better able to relate to the mentor.



So, where do TCTELA's Dream Program and partnership with the Texas Association of Future Educators (TAFE) fit into this picture?

In 2021, TCTELA launched the Dream Program, a two-year mentorship program designed to recruit and mentor future teachers of color. The four tenets of the program are diversity, equity, mentorship, and community.

Equity

With the understanding that there is a wealth gap between families of color and white families, as an organization, we are aware of the privilege that comes with being able to afford membership in academic and professional organizations. We are aware that students of color have higher amounts of student loan debt than their white counterparts and often work while attending school, which limits opportunities to participate in mentoring programs and have access to other avenues to help shape their futures as teachers. With funding from our parent organization, NCTE, each year, we can support three future teachers of color through the Dream Program. As Dream mentees, students receive a free two-year TCTELA membership and attend our annual conferences for free.

Diversity

Our organization is primarily white as the educator workforce in Texas is predominantly white and white female. The Dream Program helps expand the diversity of our membership and helps shape our current board as we seek individuals who share similar backgrounds to our Dream mentees. Much like our classrooms

across the state, cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity helps us as an organization support the ever-evolving diversity of our student population, but also helps us learn how to create safe, brave spaces for teachers of color who are hesitant to join predominantly white organizations. Through this diversity, we are more in tune with the social and instructional concerns of students and teachers of color. We can provide better resources and programming to meet those

needs and help advocate for change. The Dream Program is specifically for future teachers of color. In the current political climate of our state, diversity has grown into a curse word and one used to trigger ideas of division. However, when we think about the make of our workforce and organization, it is through programs like this that marginalized groups have an opportunity to find community. Through programs like this, our organization can engage in equitable practices.

Mentorship

Students meet quarterly with mentors of color to set personal and academic goals, work on resumes, participate in book studies, and receive professional development. Students can help plan and participate in initiatives such as Education Advocacy Day. In

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their final year in the program, students will present at the annual conference about their experience in the program and the impact of mentorship on their academic and professional journeys. The connection between the Dream mentees and their mentors remains intact upon completing the program. Mentors continue to check in with mentees to offer advice, help them remain connected to the organizations, help expand their network, and just be a place of safety when needed.

Community

Although the program is only two-years-old, Dream alums are invited back to support new mentees and are encouraged to take other roles in the organization. Through opportunities such as attending the conference to present and volunteer, Dream mentees have an opportunity to expand their learning communities by meeting other students in attendance who can become accountability partners in their quest to complete their degrees, as well as meeting with professors and educational leaders who can help them with job placement, professional advice, etc. Dream mentees always have a place in our community.

TAFE Partnership

As an organization, we want to be a part of the growing future of Texas teachers who feel supported and included during their late high school years and through their college experience. As such, we have recently partnered with the Texas Association of Future Educators (TAFE), pronounced *taffy*. TAFE is a co-curricular statewide non-profit (501 c3) student organization created to allow young men and women an opportunity to explore the teaching profession; it is nationally affiliated with Educators Rising. The organization was created in 1984 to provide the best and brightest high school and middle school students in Texas with the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions about pursuing careers in education. TAFE is sponsored by the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals and is governed by a board of directors comprised of teachers, students, and principals.

Considering the qualities an educator should possess, it becomes imperative to note the intersectionalities of TAFE's leadership framework, TRAFLES, which aligns with the Dream Program's mission. TRAFLES (Teaching/Training, Recreation, Appreciation, Fundraising, Leadership, Educational Awareness, Service) is the framework TAFE uses to ensure every school chapter has a well-rounded, successful program for future educators. Students participate in activities and events rooted in this framework year-round, leading to a well-developed and experienced educator skillset.

This opportunity allows Dream Program leaders to help support high school juniors and seniors interested in pursuing a career in ELAR education. TAFE members, upon entering college, will automatically join the Dream Program. These future educators will have an opportunity to be in community with their peers and current classroom educators, as well as receive continued support, a vital piece in professional growth and longevity in the field.

Our goal through the Dream x TAFE connection is to return to the concept of a village. It takes a village to raise future teachers of color. When school funding is held hostage by politicians, many programs suffer: coaching and mentoring programs are shut down; professional development funds are redirected or very limited; salaries and benefits do not increase; and altogether,

teaching does not look like an attractive profession. However, with programs like the Dream Program and organizations like TAFE, we can cultivate a village that provides the coaching and professional development these future teachers need.

Meet our 2021-2023 Cohort:



Karla Cardenas

Karla Cardenas, a former TAFE state President, is a first-gen student at the University of Texas at Austin. She is studying Bilingual Elementary Education with a particular interest in Education Policy.



Elisa Ramirez

Elisa is a first-generation student at the University of Houston-Downtown. She is studying Bilingual Elementary Education.

Meet our 2023-2025 Cohort:



Davon Mclean

Davon McLean is currently a student at the University of Houston Downtown. Davon is pursuing a degree in Education in hopes of becoming a secondary teacher.



Cyndol Davis

Cyndol Davis, a former TAFE member, area president, is a freshman at Sam Houston State majoring in Education and EC-6 certification. Cyndol aspires to become a elementary or intermediate school teacher in Alief ISD, the district she graduated from.



Andrew Martin

Andrew Martin, a former TAFE member at Alief Taylor HS, is a student at Sam Houston State University majoring in Education and pursuing EC-6 certification. Andrew plans to become an elementary school teacher and later pursue a career as a therapist.

If you want to volunteer in the Dream Program, please contact Dr. Lois Barker at dream.tctela@gmail.com.

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Affinity groups

By LaWanda Williams, Executive Secretary

Before the NCTE conference, affinity spaces and groups were not in my realm of knowledge. After listening to our Michigan affiliate, my interest was piqued. Affinity groups help students and educators affirm their identities with others sharing similar characteristics. As Pendharkar (2022) explains it, "Affinity groups are meant to be safe spaces for educators or students who share an identity, such as a common race or heritage, to discuss mutual concerns and help each other navigate a K-12 education system where they are in the minority." In other words, affinity groups are composed of students and educators who share an identity outside of the dominant culture.

This is especially important because research shows that while "America's student body is diversifying, teachers remain predominantly white" (Pendharkar, 2022). Students and educators often feel unheard because they do not share the same experiences as their classmates, teachers, or colleagues, creating isolation. Affinity groups provide the space they need to be able to express themselves freely.

Unfortunately, marginalized groups are often silenced, but these spaces afford students the opportunity to be part of a group where they have the voice they deserve and can be heard. Students and teachers deserve to have confidence in their identities, which could include race, gender, sexual orientation, age, or even ability. Affinity groups allow students with shared identities to talk in a safe space about common issues and transfer discussions into equitable experiences.

Educators also need access to affinity groups. Minority educators and those with other identities need a safe space and can create their own affinity groups to be able to assist students. Educators of color often feel alone on their campus because there is still a shortage of minority teachers, so "these spaces provide that validation or that support for the kind of challenges that they may encounter" (Pendharkar, 2022). For

example, educators of color are often questioned and not taken seriously when they have concerns, and "for these reasons and more, healing praxes that acknowledge internalized and systemic forms of oppression can benefit both teachers and students alike" (Ginwright, 2015). Education in the United States has systems in place that create disadvantages for students and teachers alike, and affinity spaces allow a place for shared experiences, healing, and activism.

I am looking forward to delving deeper into affinity spaces because I see it being valuable to my district. The process will have to begin with the teachers and administrators having those difficult conversations to begin the process, and teachers must go through the difficult discovery

process before they are able to deliver to students. Groups may be separate at first, but the goal is to get different affinity groups together to understand and appreciate others. As Relay (2023) explains, "With all the different identities, you can see yourself in other people...and that creates compassion, it creates connection, and it creates an opportunity for students to see each other across lines of difference." When we see and understand one another, we can all grow.

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The weight and importance of countering harmful narratives: Amplifying Arab voices in the classroom and professional learning spaces

By Dr. Lois Barker, NCTE Liaison, and Zainab Jabak, High School Section Chair

To foster an inclusive and equitable society, it is crucial to address and counter harmful narratives that perpetuate stereotypes and biases. One community that has often been subject to such narratives is the Arab community. These harmful narratives not only impact the individuals within this community but also contribute to a broader atmosphere of misunderstanding and prejudice. In educational and professional settings, the weight of countering these narratives is particularly significant. It's important for us to delve into the harmful narratives surrounding the Arab community, examine biases that perpetuate these narratives, discuss why mere exposure to diverse texts is insufficient, and explore the concept of true allyship at both individual and institutional levels.

Harmful Narratives about the Arab Community

The Arab community, a diverse and rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and histories, has been unfairly stereotyped and stigmatized through harmful narratives. These narratives often portray Arabs in a monolithic manner, reducing a multitude of distinct identities to a narrow and inaccurate representation. Media depictions frequently perpetuate harmful stereotypes, associating Arabs primarily with violence, extremism, and backwardness.

Such narratives not only marginalize and dehumanize Arab individuals but also contribute to an environment where discrimination and bias are normalized. In educational spaces, these narratives can have a profound impact on the self-esteem and academic performance of Arab students. In professional settings, they can lead to biased hiring practices, limited career opportunities, and a lack of representation in leadership roles.

Examining Biases

To counter harmful narratives, it is essential to examine and address the biases that fuel them critically. Implicit biases, often subconscious attitudes or stereotypes that influence our understanding, play a significant role in perpetuating harmful narratives about the Arab community. Educators and professionals must self-reflect to identify and confront these biases within themselves.

In educational settings, teachers should be vigilant about the materials they use and the narratives they reinforce. Bias in curriculum design, classroom discussions, and assessments

can inadvertently perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Professional learning spaces must similarly scrutinize their practices to ensure that biases are not inadvertently embedded in training materials or organizational culture.

Why Diverse Texts Isn't Enough

While including diverse texts is a positive step toward combating harmful narratives, it is not sufficient on its own. True progress requires a more comprehensive approach that involves critical analysis, thoughtful discussion, and a commitment to challenging preconceived notions. Mere exposure to diverse texts without a deliberate effort to address biases and stereotypes may result in tokenistic gestures rather than meaningful change.

Educators and professionals should seek materials that provide an authentic and nuanced portrayal of the Arab community.

Incorporating literature, history, and contemporary perspectives that reflect the diversity within the Arab world can help dispel myths and foster a more accurate understanding. Additionally, fostering an environment that encourages open dialogue and questioning can create a space where harmful narratives can be deconstructed and challenged.

What Is True Allyship: Individuals and Larger Bodies (Learning Institutions and Professional Organizations)

True allyship goes beyond performative gestures and requires sustained effort and commitment to dismantling harmful narratives. At the individual level, it involves self-education, empathy, and a willingness to confront and unlearn biases. Educators can take the initiative to attend workshops, read literature, and engage with the Arab community to broaden their understanding.

In professional settings, organizations and institutions play a pivotal role in promoting allyship. True allyship extends beyond reactive measures to proactive initiatives that address systemic issues, fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect. While attending this year's NCTE conference in Columbus, Ohio, the organization attempted to serve as allies by releasing a statement to guide attendees' interactions with each other given the reports of heightened Islamophobia and anti-semitism in our country. At the start of the conference, the organization shared a land acknowledgment they collaborated on with Indigenous



The weight and importance of countering harmful narratives: Amplifying Arab voices in the classroom and professional learning spaces (continued)

students at the Ohio State University; however, they had limited Indigenous representation in their programming. They also publicly denounced a statement regarding land acknowledgments crafted by NCTE's committee against anti-racism. This public gesture created a hostile environment for visibly Muslim and Arab attendees. Some non-Muslim and Arab attendees made vile comments in open spaces that went unchecked. Attendees' comments, compounded with NCTE's actions, caused the sole Arab author at the conference to feel physically and emotionally unsafe.

Additionally, this led to visible Arab and Muslim presenters to also feel unsafe while speaking at sessions. Allyship means leaning into discomfort. It means standing in solidarity even though current privileges might be stripped away. The one-foot-in and one-foot-out popular style of allyship is just as dangerous as remaining silent, being complicit in the face of injustice and oppression.

Readings to Help Your Allyship Journey

For those looking to embark on an allyship journey to counter harmful narratives about the Arab community, numerous resources are available. Reading materials that provide diverse perspectives, historical context, and contemporary insights is crucial in building a foundation for informed allyship. Some recommended readings include:

1. *Orientalism* by Edward Said - This seminal work explores how the West has historically depicted the East, shedding light on the power dynamics embedded in these representations.
2. *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* by Moustafa Bayoumi - This book offers a collection of personal narratives that humanize the experiences of Arab youth in the United States, challenging stereotypes and prejudices.
3. "Rethinking Globalism: The Power of Place in the Eastern Mediterranean" by Waleed Hazbun - Hazbun's work examines the complexities of the Eastern Mediterranean, providing a nuanced understanding of the region beyond common stereotypes.

Other resources to help create a safe learning space:

4. [Arab American Advocacy Wakelet](#), an ongoing curated list of Arab resources recursively updated by educators and advocates Dr. Sawsan Jaber, Zainab Jabak, Mona Mustafa, Abeer Shinnawi, and Kefah Ayesh.

5. ["Celebrating Arab Narratives for Empathy & Joy"](#) by Dr. Sawsan Jaber, a member of the NCTE Committee Against Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English (CARBTE).
6. ["Disrupting Your Texts: Why simply including diverse voices is not enough"](#) by Tricia Ebarvia, a co-founder of #Disrupttexts.
7. ["The Anti-racist Teacher Workbook"](#) by Lorena German, author of *Textured Teaching* and co-founder and academic director of The Multicultural Classroom.
8. ["This Book Is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons on How to Wake Up, Take Action, and Do The Work"](#) by Tiffany Jewel
9. ["Not the Kite Runner! Accurate Mirrors for Arab Students in an English Classroom."](#) a webinar Dr. Sawsan Jaber and Zainab Jabak presented for TCTELA's PD2Teach. Dr. Sawsan Jaber is a member of the NCTE Committee Against Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English (CARBTE) and the recipient of the 2023 NCTE CEL Teacher-Leader of Excellence Award. Zainab Jabak is the TCTELA High School Section Chair and the recipient of the 2023 Abydos Learning Promising Young Teacher Award.

Overall, countering harmful narratives about the Arab community is a responsibility that falls on both individuals and larger entities, such as learning institutions and professional organizations. Through critical examination of biases, a commitment to true allyship, and engagement with diverse perspectives, we can foster inclusive environments that challenge stereotypes and contribute to a more equitable society. By amplifying Arab voices in the classroom and professional learning spaces, we take a significant step towards building a world that celebrates diversity and embraces the richness of cultural pluralism in various educational and professional spaces.

Moving forward, it remains vital that individuals and larger organizations reflect on the values they have and wish to uphold. Ensuring that those values and missions align with actions (both at the individual and organizational level) is extremely crucial. Ultimately, if those two things do not align, those actions begin to fall into the lanes of performative activism and positional allyship. Performative activism takes shape when joining or vocalizing for a cause, which exists only when it is socially convenient and comfortable; it is often reactive with no actual longevity to it. Positional allyship does not have a place for this work, nor can it exist when educators and professional organizations claim to want to support, uplift, advocate, and protect all students.



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Dreaming what *can* be!—A found poem

By Valerie Taylor, PD2Teach Liaison

The words and phrases and sentences and lines of this found poem come from the words and phrases and sentences and lines of several speakers at this year's NCTE convention. I offer my gratitude to them for sharing their words with me.

With thanks to the following speakers at NCTE for their words: Dr. Mollie Blackburn, Jess Lifshitz, shea wesley martin,

Dr. Sawzan Jaber, Zainab Jabak, Kehaf Ayeshe, Renee Watson, Tom Hanks, Angus Fletcher, Mary Ann Smith, Sandra Murphy, María Fránquiz, and Angie Thomas.

This poem is also written in honor of Dr. Roni Dean Burren whose poetic life touched so many and whose work will live on through the lives she touched.

Dreaming what *can* be!

Books change lives,
Books save lives.

Something happens
if
you're exposed to
a great idea.

Reading is a form of
listening
taking in other people's
stories.

Through reading
we have the possibility
of moving closer to the other—
physically,
intellectually,
emotionally.

We Notice
We Name
We Interrupt
for we come to spaces with all
of who we are.

There is no leaving the personal
at the door.

So,
Gift your Story
Your Breakthrough Story.

Teachers
share who you are and
what you know

Students imagine—
become content creators
and co-designers

For
You are an Atlas and
who is telling the story
matters



New literacies

By Eva Goins, Vice President



One of the most exciting feelings when sitting through a session at NCTE is when you take copious notes and cannot wait to get back to your classroom to try what you are learning. This was the case when I attended a session named, “Using Podcasting to Deepen the Conexiones across Literature and Modalities.” It was a session offered by Jordan Thoennes from William Horlick High School in Wisconsin, K.A. Keener from New Directions High School in New York City, and Rachel Besharat Mann from Wesleyan University.

Even though it was one of the first sessions offered on a brisk Saturday morning in Columbus, Ohio, the room filled up quickly in anticipation for this different look of literacy housed under New Literacies.

New Literacies is the work surrounding individual technologies and developments such as podcasts. Podcasting increases engagement and motivation for students (Besser et al., 2022). Also, podcasting deepens traditional literacy skills and supports struggling readers and writers (Martínez et al, 2020).

The research they presented immediately led me to think about the struggling readers that sit in my classroom daily, struggling to read their choice book for ten minutes. I have grappled with the notion that I have “fake readers” in my class. They sit there in compliance, but they aren’t diving into the book, practicing the literary skills that will build their stamina and make them better readers.

Alas, this session gave me a solution...podcasts. Ms. Kenner explained how she immerses her students in podcasts in her classroom as the first step to her podcasting starter process. She has them listen to short high interest podcasts—some of her favorite podcasts for students are: *Everything is Alive*, *Poetry Unbound*, *This Movie Changed Me*, and *Radio Diaries*. She then has her students fill out a Podcasting Listening Sheet that covers the same skills a reader response journal prompt does. She even shared her example document so all of the attendees could make a copy for their own students.

Even though the main purpose of this session was to get students to publish their own podcasts, I was distracted thinking of the way I could use her podcasting listening sheet with my students. I immediately thought of my students that aren’t reading during choice reading and started thinking how I would encourage my readers to continue reading with their eyes, but for my students that weren’t reading at all, I would now encourage them to read with their ears. The excitement continues to grow in my teacher’s heart as I feel this could be a gamechanger for all of my students.

My goal is to create a culture of podcast listeners in my classroom and dive into the New Literacies. Once this occurs, I will continue with the process that was laid out for us during this innovative session:

1. Exposure: Independent Listening
2. Mini-Lessons: Mentor Texts Craft Moves & Content Structure
3. Drafting Scripts
4. Recording
5. Sound Design
6. Publishing

References:

- Besser, E. D., Blackwell, L. E., & Saenz, M. (2021). Engaging students through educational podcasting: Three stories of implementation. *Technology, knowledge and Learning*, 1-16.
- Martínez-Bravo, M. C., Sádaba-Chalezquer, C., & Serrano-Puche, J. (2020). Fifty years of digital literacy studies: A meta-research for interdisciplinary and conceptual convergence. *Profesional de la información*, 29(4).

FOCUS ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



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Big topics, little readers—NCTE and me

By Markesha Tisby, Vice President-Elect of Membership & Affiliates

Last November I scratched attending the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) annual convention off my bucket list. It was an incredible experience! With a theme like *Conexciones*, I should have known I was in for a treat. I went from session to session wide-eyed and hopeful. The presenters, speakers, educators, and authors did not disappoint.

If you have spent any time with me at all, you know about my obsession with children's literature. I truly believe the solutions to many of the world's problems can be found in a picture book, and the first session I attended was in direct alignment with that belief. I should have known that I was in the correct space when I saw the title slide projected on the screen was filled with bright colors and main characters from a newly released picture book. The session title was *Big Topics for Little Readers: Creating Connection Through Empathy*.

I quickly found a seat up front and sparked a conversation with Danette, a 3-5 teacher from a place that I have never visited with a name that I can't remember. We chatted giddily and prepared to take lots of notes. I noticed the four presenters appeared to be as excited and giggly as the audience. Soon, we were welcomed and jumped right in with each of the presenters sharing topics that students may face while in our care and classrooms and several titles that might help with those conversations, create connections, and foster empathy.

First up was author Kelly Swemba. Kelly dove right in with a big topic: grief. She encouraged us to talk about our own feelings first before jumping into conversations with children. She posed a few questions for us adults: How does death and loss make you feel? Have you acknowledged your blind spots? What are your personal triggers? These questions must be thought through because children don't realize or understand all of the feelings they are having. We can't help them if we have not received some clarity for ourselves.

Next up, author and illustrator Kaz Windness asked us to dig deep when thinking about perspective-taking and celebrating differences. She shared titles surrounding the ideas of validating differences and advocacy. Her own title, *Bitsy Bat School Star*, is written from the perspective of the only bat in a classroom full of nocturnal animals.

Then, Monica Acker had us explore some of the hidden challenges that connect all of us. Some of those topics included

serious illnesses, divorce, food insecurity, and moving to a new place. She shared a quote from author and editor Winsome Bingham, "We need books with sugar and books with lemons. Books can have every flavor. We can't let children think life

is only sweet." How perfect was that? She also shared that just like reading can be helpful, our students can benefit from writing about their tough experiences or writing a book for someone else who may experience the same thing one day.

Finally, author and first grade teacher Andrew Hacket shared how using humor to address tough topics can be helpful in some situations. Laughter really is the best medicine, right? Hacket shared that if a text is funny, it grabs students' attention, seems

nonthreatening, and increases the chances of students asking to read it again. However, he cautioned us to not tackle a big topic if the connections and classroom culture are not set.

Another great piece of advice I received during the session was that not every title has to be a class read-aloud. Some might be one-on-one conference situations, book recommendations for families, conversation starters, or live in the calm corner. No matter how we choose to use the recommended titles, I am sure the connection will be key to helping little readers take on big topics.

Recommended Titles

Grief:

- *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst
- *Dance Like a Leaf* by A.J. Irving
- *Ida Always* by Caron Levis
- *The Boy and the Gorilla* by Jackie Azúa Kramer
- *The Rough Patch* by Brian Lies
- *The Memory Box: A Book About Grief* by Joanna Rowland
- *Missing Violet* by Kelly Swemba
- *The Rabbit Listened* by Cori Doerrfeld

Perspective Taking & Celebrating Differences

- *Worm and Caterpillar Are Friends* by Kaz Windness
- *Ollie, the Acorn, and the Mighty Idea* by Andrew Hacket
- *Bitsy Bat, School Star* by Kaz Windness



Continued on next page.

Big topics, little readers—NCTE and me (continued)

- *A Friend for Henry* by Jenn Bailey
- *A Day with No Words* by Tiffany Hammond
- *Too Much!: An Overwhelming Day* by Jolene Gutiérrez
- *She Kept Dancing: The True Story of a Professional Dancer with a Limb Difference* by Sydney Mesher & Catherine Laudone

Hidden Challenges Feeling Seen

- *Brave Like Mom* by Monica Acker
- *Mabel's Topsy-Turvy Homes* by Candy Wellins
- *Saturday at the Food Pantry* by Diane O'Neill
- *When You Are Brave* by Pat Zietlow Miller

Using Humor to Address Tough Topics

- *The Recess Queen* by Alexis O'Neill
- *Enemy Pie* by Derek Munson

- *Rude Cakes* by Rowboat Watkins
- *Don't Think About Purple Elephants* by Susanne Merritt
- *The Unbudgeable Curmudgeon* by Matthew Burgess
- *What Are You So Grumpy About* by Tom Lichtenheld
- *There Might Be Lobsters* by Carolyn Crimi
- *The Monster Above the Bed* by Kailei Pew
- *I Can't Draw* by Stephen Martin
- *Curlilocks and the Three Hares* by Andrew Hackett

References:

Acker, M., Hackett, A., Swemba, K., Windness, K. (2023, November 16-19). *Big Topics for Little Readers: Creating Connection Through Empathy* [Conference Session]. National Council of Teachers of English, Columbus, OH. United States

Reflections from NCTE

By LaWanda Williams, Executive Secretary



It is that time of year to begin preparing for the TCTELA conference. It will be another momentous year as we Forge the Future of Literacy at Kalahari in Round Rock. The conference always provides tools for my toolkit and fires up my passion for education.

This was my first year attending the NCTE conference, and I was not disappointed. Jacqueline Woodson, Tom Hanks, Angie Thomas, and so many others demonstrated their love of teachers. Seeing authors and actors you have been reading or watching for years pay homage to teachers was refreshing. In today's educational climate, many teachers have negative thoughts thrown at them daily.

Conferences provide exposure to so many topics, it is often difficult to narrow session decisions. I began my sessions with one on Critical Race Theory. This is certainly a topic we are warned is not to be discussed at school, yet it desperately needs to be discussed. The key thing I took away from this session is that

Critical Race Theory is just telling our country's history and the impacts of that history.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) in the classroom was also interesting. I know some educators are frowning at AI, but the future is here. It can be a valuable tool for students and teachers if taught to use it correctly. For teachers, AI can help with lesson plans and differentiation. For students, it aids accessibility and individual planning. This is something I would not have researched much if I had not attended the AI session, and I now encourage other educators to research it because AI will change education.

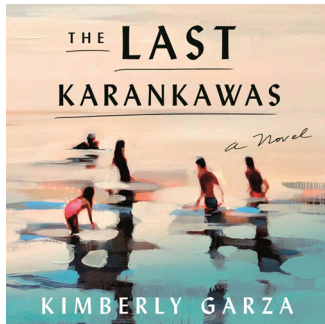
There was another session where we met with other affiliates to discuss the negativity and hate in our world and how we can help. This was a touching session as there were tears of pain and frustration. We were able to comfort one another and discuss hurtful topics that are being spewed across the news and social media. It became apparent that we need to create safe spaces to discuss the trauma we face so we can overcome it.

Book bans are a topic all over. I love Jacqueline Woodson's comment, "Books can't hurt people, but they provide empathy." Tom Hanks described how the wonderful teachers in his life made a difference. He stated, "I owe my success to a junior college." This is where he could think freely but was held accountable. Angie Thomas' message was, "You cannot live life based on what other people think of us. Live authentically." These amazing individuals helped us see that we make a difference in the lives of our students even when we don't see it.

All of these topics and many more at NCTE gave me hope and made me excited about the future. Our TCTELA Conference is quickly approaching, and my hope is that teachers will receive more tools for their toolkit and more kindling to keep the flames of passion ignited for education and their students.

The Last Karankawas: A haunting symphony for middle school minds

By Janeth Comejo, Co-Editor, *English in Texas*



As a middle school educator, I am always on the lookout for fresh, engaging stories that spark curiosity, challenge perspectives, and resonate with students. Kimberly Garza's *The Last Karankawas* ticks all those boxes—and then some. It's a powerful and poetic novel that sweeps the reader into Texas history, the lives of a diverse community on Galveston Island, family secrets, and a fight

for survival. Let me tell you, this novel delivered.

First, the setting. Garza paints a vivid picture of Galveston Island, weaving its salty breeze, sun-baked sand, and whispering tides into the narrative. It becomes more than just a backdrop; it's a living character, shaping the lives of the diverse community at its heart. From the descendants of the Karankawa tribe to Mexican immigrants and Filipino families, each thread of Galveston's tapestry comes alive.

The novel doesn't shy away from complex themes like cultural displacement and environmental loss, and it is a masterclass in knitting together multiple timelines and perspectives. Readers follow Carly, a young girl grappling with her family's past and the impending hurricane, and Jess, a young descendant of the Karankawas who is piecing together her heritage and straddling the line between her Karankawa background and the dominant Anglo culture. This dual perspective allows students to understand the impact of colonization and its lasting effects on marginalized communities. Their stories intertwine with historical glimpses of Karankawa resilience and the island's turbulent history. This multi-layered approach is perfect for middle schoolers, keeping them engaged by jumping between past and present, suspense and reflection.

The Last Karankawas is more than just a historical fiction adventure. It delves into themes of identity, family, and the importance of preserving cultural heritage. Carly's journey of self-discovery resonated deeply with me as an educator and Latina. Her struggle to understand her family's Karankawa roots mirrored the challenges many students face in navigating their own cultural identities. Garza tackles these themes with sensitivity and honesty, sparking conversations about inclusivity, acceptance, and the power of family history.

The writing itself is lyrical, painting vivid scenes and breathing life into the characters. Garza's prose is both poetic and accessible, making it perfect for middle schoolers who are still developing their reading muscles. I found myself highlighting sentences and passages that I knew would resonate with students, eager to share them in class discussions.

Yes, there are some mature themes such as loss and discrimination, but Garza handles them with grace and sensitivity, offering opportunities for students to think critically about complex issues. This isn't a book to shy away from; it's an invitation to forge forward to a path of dialogue, understanding, and empathy.

Overall, *The Last Karankawas* is a treasure trove of a book. It's a captivating story, a window into Texas' forgotten past, and a mirror reflecting the challenges and triumphs of diverse communities. I highly recommend it for both classroom reading and personal enjoyment. It's a book that stays with you long after you turn the last page, prompting reflection, sparking discussion, and ultimately, enriching your understanding of the world around you.



Bonus points for teaching this book:

- The book offers valuable historical context for Texas history lessons, especially focusing on the Karankawa tribe and Galveston Island's development.
- The diverse characters and their struggles with identity provide excellent opportunities for discussions about inclusivity and cultural awareness.
- Garza's lyrical prose and vivid descriptions can inspire students' own writing and creative expression.
- References to familiar surrounding staples such as 97.9 The Box (Houston-area hip-hop/rap radio station) and H-E-B (Texas-based grocery chain) will create access points of engagement for Texas students..
- Garza weaves in Tagalog and Spanish phrases that add to the diversity of her characters.

So, if you're a middle school teacher looking for a powerful, thought-provoking read for yourself or your students, look no further. *The Last Karankawas* is a must-read. Just be prepared for lively discussions and a renewed appreciation for the stories hidden beneath the surface of our familiar landscapes.

Kimberly Garcia, the author of *The Last Karankawas*, will be the Saturday keynote speaker at the 2024 TCTELA Conference. Join us January 26-28, 2024, at the Kalahari Resort in Round Rock, Texas to hear Ms. Garcia's personal insights and reflections on her work as a writer.

Reference:

Garza, K. L. (2023). *The last Karankawas*. Little, Brown and Company.

It takes a village: Forging relationships to achieve literacy

By Aisha Christa Atkinson, Digital Coordinator

In the field of education, stakeholders will often cite the African proverb that “it takes a village to raise a child.” To show that child love, provide them with a sense of belonging and security, and—of course—build within them a wealth of knowledge requires the investment of many as opposed to one. One individual cannot achieve this feat alone. We all know this, and yet we somehow, ironically, hold the perception that the literacy skills of a child is something that can only be developed in the isolative guidance of a common select few: the literacy educator and the custodial guardians of said child.

Out of total transparency, I once held this belief as a teacher and even as an instructional coach at the secondary and elementary levels. And I carried the weight of that responsibility on my shoulders like a badge of honor. In reality it was a clear indicator of not knowing how to obtain support in sharing the weight. That would all come to a mindset-altering change in August of 2022 when the Chief of Schools of my district, Dr. Dawn DuBose, asked if I would be interested in serving as the district representative for Stafford Municipal School District’s participation in a competitive literacy program called Read to the Final Four.



Established in Houston as part of the Men’s Final Four basketball tournament festivities in 2016, Read to the Final Four is “an annual literacy challenge aimed at creating a lifelong love and interest in reading for students across the states in which the Men’s Final Four and Women’s Final Four are conducted” (NCAA). Mirroring similar concepts of the athletic competition, the program challenges third grade students of participating campuses to read as much as they can through the calculation of total reading minutes and, following a few months of practice runs, pits campuses against one another through championship brackets to compete for prizes until a champion campus is chosen. As the competition advances, community partners such as librarians, local booksellers, literacy advocates, musicians, and undergraduate interns work together to enrich the literacy

development and show appreciation for teachers and the students they serve from beginning to end.

Beginning with a launch event in September of 2022 at the Barbara Bush Literacy Plaza, Read to the Final Four kicked off with opening remarks to an audience of students and educators by Houston Local Organizing Committee (HLOC) Senior Director of Community Relations, Dorita

Hatchett, about the significance of third grade as a critical year of literacy acquisition because it is the grade level where students make the switch from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” and “reading for joy.” This is supported even within our own standards for English language arts instruction in Texas as educators are encouraged to foster this through the regular practice of self-sustained reading opportunities in the classroom. However, as also shared out by Hatchett, it takes so much more than just the opportunity to read—it takes engagement and investment from everyone to help students truly embrace readership as an enhancement of self. As the leader of HLOC, she and her team committed to showing us how to do that over the months leading up to the Final Four Championship.

Throughout the challenge, students were tasked with logging minutes read every week via a paper log sheet or our district-wide reading motivation platform, Beanstack. The reading minutes of all students in each class were then added together and their class minutes entered into the NCAA’s platform, HelperHelper. During the first few weeks, I opted to incentivize the process by creating brag tags for teachers with the most minutes read as well as prizes and certificates for “Readers of the Week” at Stafford Elementary School and Stafford STEM Magnet Academy. Recipients for Reader of the Week were randomly selected through the platform Wheel of Names with intentional representation from all classrooms. They received LED sunglasses I purchased myself to bring a level of “cool” to readership. I also designated a student representative from each campus to help with promoting the competition, modeling best practices for reading, and encouraging their classmates even over the holiday breaks. During Black History Month, I even had the opportunity to escort a cohort of students from both campuses to Stafford Early Childhood Center to conduct read-alouds of books by African American authors to prekindergarten and kindergarten students. This created a full-circle moment where these third-grade students had the rare



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It takes a village: Forging relationships to achieve literacy (continued)



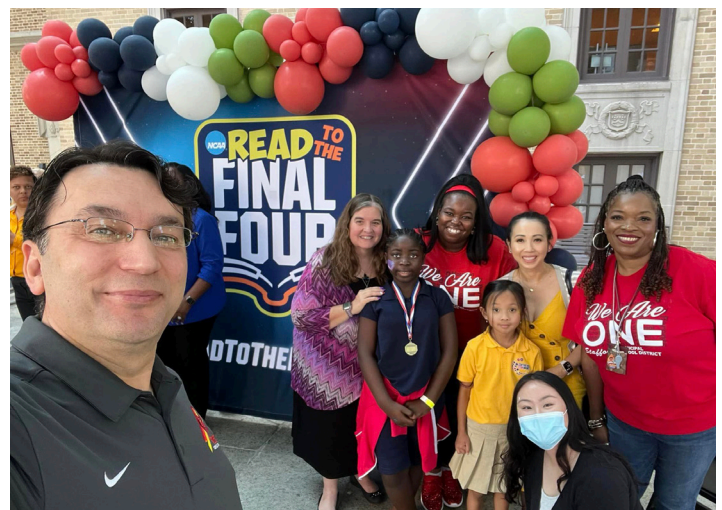
experience of showing their former teachers just how far they'd come in their academic journeys.

As we transitioned into “tournament season,” all students were treated to prizes courtesy of the NCAA and local community partners for campuses that advanced on the bracket. These prizes included, but were not limited to branded bookmarks, books of choice from Houston-area non-profit organization Books Between Kids, keychains, and so much more.

As the weeks progressed, we continued to advance in the tournament, and student investment began to soar to levels I had not anticipated. Prize distributions and placement announcements had to change from the mornings to the afternoons because our students saw me as the Read-to-the-Final-Four-lady. If they saw me in the hallways, they would question our placement, share with me what they were reading, and—occasionally—even ask me what I was reading. This enthusiasm reached an entirely new level of excitability when HLOC, Books Between Kids, and a Houston-based program known as Reading With A Rapper partnered together to make a Literacy Tour stop in our district. In less than three hours time, a team of well over thirty volunteers in collaboration with the Stafford MSD Operations and Maintenance Department as well as the City of Stafford transformed our Civic Center into a space where reading is all things magical and joyful. This event integrated literacy into an opening assembly of figurative language, stations of virtual reality games, reading nooks, book selections, and more, with a grand finale of a surprise musical performance of the song “Torch” by local rapper, Buddie Roe. This performance even included a printed copy of the lyrics

in multiple languages to all students in an effort to make the performance as linguistically accessible as possible. Following the performance, students had an opportunity to hear the artist's own journey of literacy development, emphasizing how important it is to be a lifelong reader of books.

Seeing the looks on our students' faces as they took it all in, excitedly participated in activities, and walked away with bags of books that not only featured characters that looked like them, but that were hand-selected by them was a restoring experience for myself. But as these same students innocently rushed up to me to thank me, the person they had grown accustomed to knowing as



the Read-to-the-Final-Four-lady for bringing this opportunity to them, I had an epiphany in the midst of correcting their gratitude to the volunteers around us.

Although my heart was always in the right place, my approach to fostering student appreciation for reading in silo was in some ways not as effective as it could've been. How much more could we achieve towards increasing the literacy rates of our students if we—districts, communities, business, entertainers—came together like this in the name of literacy? How many more lives could I have impacted in this way had I been more willing to bravely forge new relationships with others who want to achieve the same things I did?

It truly takes a village to create literate humans.

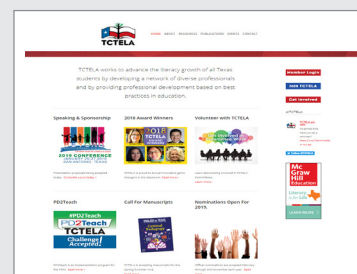
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...to the website



AI

By Eva Goins, Vice President

The options regarding AI at NCTE were abundant this year. The one that stood out was a session entitled “ChatGPT and Me: Leaning into Generative AI in the Secondary English Classroom.” It was led by Josh Rothstein, Joe Pacitti, and Brooke Carpenter from the Colonial School District in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania.

The session began with some sample writings that the attendees had to choose which two had been written by bots and which had been written by human brain power. It was quite difficult to distinguish between

the two because even after seeing the answer key, the bot’s written responses read like they had a voice.

Immediately, I was intrigued with this session. The presenters used ChatGPT to define what generative AI was. They were extremely specific when asking for their response from the bot, down to how many sentences they wanted it to include.

According to ChatGPT, “Generative AI models, like GPT-4, learn from analyzing extensive datasets, enabling them to create human-like text responses, making them valuable for educational tools, content creation, and more. They work by predicting the next word in a sequence, thus generating coherent and contextually relevant sentences. However, they can lack deep comprehension and critical thinking, sometimes producing incorrect or biased content based on their training data. Additionally, there are ethical challenges, such as potential misuse and data privacy concerns. Despite these limitations, generative AI’s ability to automate and assist in various tasks presents significant opportunities for enhancing educational experiences and outcomes.”

The presenters defined generative AI as “scans through a massive amount of information to generate a response to a prompt.” They continued to state that they felt that AI can support student achievement by providing scaffolding and adaptations to meet individual student needs. AI can also support equity by providing teacher assistance, allowing more time for meaningful face-to-face interactions with their students.

So how can AI be used to help teachers?

- **Planning:** organizing information, materials in alignment with state standards, professional collaboration tool
- **Differentiation:** meeting everyone’s needs, differentiating reading levels/assessments, providing options and sentence starters
- **Teaching:** modeling, demonstrating

The session leaders provided three different AI bots to experiment with: [ChatGPT](#), [Magic School](#), and [Bard AI](#). ChatGPT can be used for brainstorming ideas or summarizing or bullet-pointing. Magic School is catered more for educators and has many tools that could be useful like rubric creation, study guides, project-based learning, lesson plan creator, differentiation tool, and the most exciting text-leveler. Bard AI is Google’s version of ChatGPT.

When using any type of AI, to get the best results, one must know how to prompt the chatbot specifically for what you are looking for. The presenters stated an easy starting point would be to use the RAFT strategy: **Role, Audience, Format, Task.**

The example they gave was: “You are a competent and rigorous teacher with a sense of humor teaching 8th grade English students. Provide a paragraph of directions for a menu assignment of 3 choice

tasks for students to share out their independent reading along with a 5 point rubric including Content, Presentation, Style, Conventions.”

It was astounding what each of the generative AI programs produced. You must go take a look!

As the room felt like the air had all been sucked up at once, reality started to settle in among the attendees in the room. Everyone was thinking the same thing ... ethics. Students have always tried to figure out ways to get a little extra help and now cheating will be even harder to detect.

For the cheating, the presenters stated that there are currently no reliable detectors. The best approach is to talk to students about cheating and integrity. They also recommended asking students to complete a cloze activity with their essay or answer questions about it. They said that writing conferences throughout the writing process would be paramount.

As for teachers, where is the ethical line for using AI? They offered this resource: <https://ditchthattextbook.com/ai-policies/>. They also reiterated that teachers shouldn’t use it to replace necessary human feedback and engagement, connections, and relationships. Teachers are and will be responsible for the materials they create and provide for their students.

AI is not going away. If used properly, it could enhance the educational environment in so many positive ways.



Found in translation

By Donna Herrera, Middle School Section Chair

Inspiration. That is what we aspire to do in our classrooms. Inspiration is the guiding hand through a writing piece, the guiding voice when we teach our students to enunciate words, it is the spark of enthusiasm that gets a student excited about their book, or perhaps it is the voice that reminds them they, too, are writers. They, too, have a story to tell. It is the soothing voice that reminds them that, “Your story is your revolution.”

At the NCTE conference, I saw the meeting of the minds and panel from G. Neri, Emery Lord, A.S. King, and e. E. Charlton-Trujillo. To describe their panel as life-changing doesn’t begin to encapsulate the emotions, ideas, or relevance that took place in that conference room. This session also became a place to feel seen and heal—“Explore the absurd” and “You cannot heal your trauma while you ignore it” as A. S. King said. This should be taken into the classroom as conversations or inspiration to choose to teach with empathy and understanding.

I walked away with a picture book from e. E. Charlton-Trujillo but also with the affirmation that empathy and the ability to inspire are our biggest tools as teachers. E. mentions we all have a story within us. They explained that story doesn’t restrict itself to paper and state exams. The story becomes a realm to which we imagine, create, explore, destroy, and renovate or emulate. Story is identity and freedom simultaneously.

e. E. Charlton-Trujillo’s picture books, *Lupe Lopez: Rock Star Rules* and *Lupe Lopez: Reading Rock Star*, do just that. It is a picture book for children of all ages, and I would argue even more for middle and high school. Walk to the beat of your own drum. Find a balance that works for *you*. It is a coming-of-age story meant for everyone and any classroom.



In my classroom, I specifically chose to read the Spanish version first then the English version. As we read, we wrote down words that stood out to us in Spanish (This worked even for non-Spanish speakers—they noticed the power of sound and language). I then asked which version resonated most with them. What character did they connect most with? The conversation then broke off into different dialects and colloquialisms

of Spanish. Their language is adjacent to their identity. Latinx. Hispanic. Mexican. Chicanx. The different generations of growing up as first generation versus second or third, or debating if it should be said *camioneta* or *troca*. We spoke of themes from the book and wrote alternate endings consisting of plays, poems, or essays. Their thoughts and connections dictated their form of writing.

A reading classroom has a lot on its shoulders by teaching all the TEKS and still squeezing in connection, inclusivity, and empathy, but it’s these small teaching moments that will leave a lasting impression in our students’ lives. A space to learn and make mistakes, to feel inspired, to feel seen and heard, to connect and empathize with each other, or to be reminded “their story is a revolution.”

References:

- Charlton-Trujillo, e. E. (2022). *Lupe Lopez: Rock Star Rules!* Candlewick Press (MA).
- Charlton-Trujillo, e. E., Miller, P. Z., Cepeda, J., & León, L. G. (2022). *Lupe Lopez: ¡reglas de una estrella de rock!* Candlewick Press.

FOCUS ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



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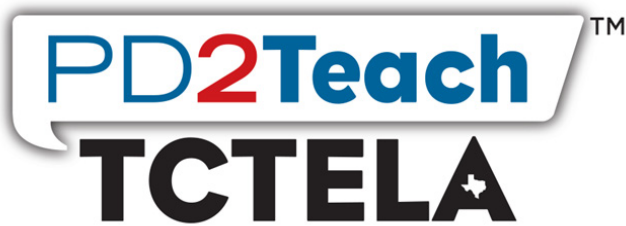


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New webinars posted on PD2Teach Bulb

By Valerie Taylor and Isabel Tuliao, PD2Teach Liaisons



During this fall semester, TCTELA had the privilege of hosting three webinars, two of which are now posted on the [PD2Teach Bulb](#).

One of these webinars, *Banned Books and What Students Can Do About It*, features Nicole Miltonberger from the Vandegrift High School Banned Books Club. The Vandegrift High School Banned Book Club aims to help students find their voice and be active in their community in response to book censorship. Their work has been featured in the Texas Tribune, KVUE, Washington Post, PBS, and Good Morning America. In the webinar, Nicole shares how and why this club formed as well as information about the work they have been doing in their school to promote the reading and discussing of books that have faced challenges recently and in the past. In addition to watching and listening to the webinar recording that you can find [here](#), you can also check out [the club's website](#) to learn more about their work. If you're wondering what you and your students might do to take action in response to attempts to remove books from school libraries and classrooms, this webinar will provide you with some ideas while also allowing you to celebrate the work that the students at Vandegrift High School in Leander ISD have been doing. You may also be interested in checking out some of NCTE's relevant position statements: [The Students' Right to Read, NCTE Position Statement on Rating or "Red Flagging" Books, Guidelines for Dealing with Censorship of Instructional Materials](#), and the [Statement on Classroom Libraries](#).

The second new webinar we have posted features Dr. Margaret Hale, professor at the University of Houston, co-founder of Tweens Read, and former TCTELA President. In this webinar, *Finding Support in Troubling Times*, Dr. Hale shares a variety of ways literacy educators can find support when facing the overwhelming task of sharing books with students. These include belonging to and participating in trusted and credible professional



organizations as well as relying on noted leaders in the field and well-known publications in the field of children's and young adult literature. She also shares many book titles for consideration! You can find the recording [here](#), and it offers a great possibility for sparking conversation in a department or team meeting at your school or in your district.

The PD2Teach Bulb site now includes 36 webinars that you can access for your own learning or learning alongside your colleagues. We hope you take advantage of this amazing resource brought to you by TCTELA.



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Call for submissions

Review the submission guidelines at https://www.tctela.org/english_in_texas.

English in Texas, Vol. 54.1 (Spring/Summer 2024)

Theme: Forge the Future of Literacy

Manuscript Deadline: April 1, 2024

"First, it is important to recognize what guides the decisions teachers make. It begins with the simple question: What do I believe as a teacher?" –Michael J. Young

TCTELA President Charles Moore's 2024 conference theme, "Forge the Future of Literacy," calls on teachers to take charge of our future and to "reclaim the narrative of literacy learning" (Moore, 2023). As Young (2021, p. 123) indicates, this reclamation must start with teachers contemplating their own beliefs. As teachers and sculptors of the future, it is essential that we determine what is important to us and forge the future by letting our beliefs about literacy learning craft the way.

For the Spring/Summer 2024 issue of English in Texas, we invite you to consider how you are forging the future and how you plan to do so going forward. Some pedagogical questions to consider for manuscript submissions are any of the following, any fusion of the following, or any extension beyond the following:

- What do you believe is essential for the future of literacy education?
- What literacy practices do you believe are ineffective and not beneficial for the future growth of our students?
- What must teachers do to protect the future of literacy education?
- What literacy skills will our students need in order to be successful in the future?
- How can we embolden teachers to advocate for the future of literacy education?
- How can we embolden students to advocate for their own future literacy needs?

More broadly, you may also consider the following:

- What does it mean to forge the future of literacy education?
- What stance and/or perspective are you planning to take as you forge the future of literacy education?

FOCUS ON THE THEME: We invite interested individuals to submit manuscripts, conceptual, creative, reflective, student-authored, pedagogical, research-based, and/or theoretical, as related to this topic of Forge the Future of Literacy.

INQUIRIES AND INNOVATIONS: Additionally, we welcome educational research relevant to the work of ELAR educators. These submissions could either be theme-dependent or could be more generally relevant to the ELAR education community.

STANDING COLUMNS:

We also encourage brief contributions in the form of standing columns. These center on topics that interest you but do not necessarily align to an issue's theme or full-length manuscript requirements.

A Seat and a Voice at the Table

This column focuses on supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion to empower groups that are too often marginalized in the ELAR classroom.

What does your seat at the table look like day-to-day? How are you striving to bring diverse texts, methods, and instructional design to the forefront of 21st-century instruction?

"Diversity is having a seat at the table, inclusion is having a voice, and belonging is having that voice be heard." –Liz Fosslien

Keeping Your Wits About You

This column focuses on teacher self-care in today's often challenging educational environment.

How do you keep your wits while the world spins—often wildly!—on its axis each day? What are your personal and professional approaches to bringing hope and balance to the world of teaching?

"If you can keep your wits about you while all others are losing theirs, and blaming you... The world will be yours and everything in it..." –Rudyard Kipling

Teaching Outtakes

This column focuses on sharing the "aha" lessons from the "uh-oh" moments in your classroom.

As educators, we often talk about "what works," but how has the "not working" turned you into a more knowledgeable practitioner and a more streetwise professional? How did the "not working" inform you in your teaching and help you to grow?

"Mistakes are a fact of life. It is the response to error that counts." –Nikki Giovanni

To submit any of these standing columns for publication consideration, please contact the editorial team at EnglishinTexas@uhd.edu with a 100-150-word summary of your idea BEFORE submitting.

The Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts neither endorses nor opposes political candidates or parties. TCTELA encourages a free and open exchange of ideas. For this reason, the content of conference presentations or articles in *English in Texas* and *Texas Voices* may not necessarily reflect the views of TCTELA or its members.