The New Segregation
GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND IMMIGRATION

TEACHING TOLERANCE

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This kit profiles exemplary pre-K through 3rd-grade classrooms in which peace, equity and justice are guiding themes.

DVD only

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The New Segregation
SPECIAL SECTION

18 The Only One
How educators can help when a student is the only person of color in the class

20 Into the Mainstream
Genuine inclusion can be an uphill battle for parents of kids with disabilities — but it’s worth the effort, for everyone.

25 Gender Segregation
Gender-segregated classrooms spark strong and varied reactions, but research regarding their effectiveness remains inconclusive.

28 Unmaking Brown
Our schools are more racially segregated now than they were 40 years ago. Scholars explain how we got here — and how to reverse the trend.

33 Uncovering the Movement
How to teach the Civil Rights Movement in communities that remain segregated

36 Home High
They’re a haven for gay kids — but are LGBT-friendly schools opening the door to a new kind of segregation?

40 Immigrant Schools: A Better Choice?
Are newly arrived immigrants better served by schools focused on their needs?
How We Live Our Lives

BY LEICIA J. BROOKS

The great promise of the 1954 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education was that children would grow up together in integrated schools. They would prove the segregationists wrong. Black children and white children would learn to respect one another as equals and bring down the walls of racial separation. Through the efforts of our children, our nation would live up to the ideals of equality and justice for all.

And, as an added bonus, we’d finally abandon the false notion that separate was equal. Instead we’d make a commitment to provide quality educational opportunities for every child.

That’s just not what happened.

This issue of Teaching Tolerance uncovers what did happen. The sad truth is that public schools are more racially segregated today than they were 40 years ago. Oh, and we’re back to buying into the belief that separate can be equal — and this time around we’re not limiting segregated space to race. As you’ll see in “Immigrant Schools: A Better Choice?” and “Homo High,” communities are attempting to address the very real needs of students who are ill-served by schools they are zoned or otherwise compelled to attend by creating culturally sensitive, safe spaces just for them.

Just for them? Yes, that’s segregation, too. But there is a difference.

Back in the days of Jim Crow, segregated schools existed solely to support the illogical and damaging notion of white supremacy. Though many would argue that black students fared far better academically in the segregated South than they do in any region of the country today, there was a high psychological price to pay. Blacks were deemed inferior to whites and as such we were forbidden from going to school with them. As we know, racial segregation was also the law of the land at restaurants, water fountains and on the bus. In more communities than we’d like to admit — we’d like to admit, segregation wasn’t just about schools; it was a social norm.

Today, the legal rules governing social relationships no longer dictate separateness. Each of us has some say over how we live our lives — and, as parents, how we’ll raise our kids — segregated, integrated or a hybrid combination of the two.

As I look back on my own experience as a single parent raising a male child in Los Angeles, I find that we were constantly navigating integrated and segregated spaces. I was committed to doing everything I could to ensure that Daniel had more opportunities than our race and class members had to take Daniel out of that school before he began to internalize their biases.

Thus began the improbable journey — through too many schools, in search of a quality education. Today, my son and I have an unshakeable appreciation for who we are and where we came from. We live naturally integrated lives and would have it any other way.

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Thus began the improbable journey — through too many schools, in search of a quality education. Today, my son and I have an unshakeable appreciation for who we are and where we came from. We live naturally integrated lives and would have it any other way.
The achievement gap is a serious pandemic that has implications much more insidious than this reading level statistic. Sarah Moore via Facebook

Pushed Out
I am so glad to read the article about the Zero Tolerance policy alternatives (“Pushed Out,” Fall 2009). I worked as an ESL teacher in a kindergarten classroom where one of our students was homeless and would often bring banned toys to school (toy guns, etc.) and, because of the policy, would be suspended. I am not an advocate of toy guns, by any means. However, if a child is homeless and receives a toy as a gift, where is he supposed to keep it? Andonia McKinney St. Paul, Minn.

Kudos
Thank you for your work, for your method of gathering and sharing ideas that are actually working to develop understanding, cooperation, respect and harmony among those with different customs, expectations, values and beliefs. Often the desire is there, but the “how to” and “why” creates a chasm that is difficult to bridge. Thank you for giving some ways and means as well as explanations about “why” in order to create an environment of understanding. Emily Mumma Lorida, Fla.

As an educator, I want to thank you for the work you are doing. This is the stuff that can bring about real change in our society.” Diane Horan against ‘Kindergarten’
Stop sending me your magazine!! The homosexual couple portrayed in Fall 2009 (“Our Journey to Kindergarten”) makes me sick. I treat all kids the same. But homosexuality is a SIN. Sandy Newton Scottsville, Ky.

I have no problem whatsoever with the authors as a lesbian couple, but their objections to “real” public schools border on the ridiculous. One of their chief complaints appears to be holding open houses on weekdays during working hours. It seems that these ladies consider teachers and school staff to be at their beck and call and want school staff to put in extra hours so that school functions can be convenient to their personal schedules. What ever happened to putting your child first and taking time off from work and going to the school? Gay Moore Fantozzi Falls Church, Va.

No address given
Prom Night in Mississippi
I watched [the film Prom Night in Mississippi] with my family yesterday. Since we live in the South, we really weren’t surprised by the segregation. It was great to see a majority of the students were strong enough to take action to make a change. Jessica Johnson via Facebook

There were strong enough to take action to make a change. Jessica Johnson via Facebook

As an educator, I want to thank you for the work you are doing. This is the stuff that can bring about real change in our society.”

To be continued...
I never wanted to be a teacher. I hated teachers. Growing up, I told myself I would be a movie star, a famous writer and a media mogul in the tradition of Ted Turner. Teaching was the furthest from my mind, and being a teacher was worse to me than almost any other job. I could not understand why or how people became teachers, and would never, ever, submit myself to that type of torture and disrespect.

I grew up in a family of teachers: my mother, grandfather, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandmother were all teachers. My discontent with teachers started in the home. During the holidays I would dread sitting with the family, because it always turned into an oral pop quiz. I would be bombarded with math equations that I should be able to solve without pencil and paper, calculator or fingers. I would have to spell “grade-level-appropriate” vocabulary, which often became an exercise in confusion. This fueled my feelings about teachers. Needless to say, I could not wait to return and take it out on the unsuspecting teachers at school on Monday.

The turning point was when I entered college and had to take general education classes my freshman and sophomore years. I began to notice the difference between the great teachers and the ones who were indifferent to my abilities as a student. I began to notice my own strengths and attribute them to the teachers who nurtured and augmented them. I also noticed my weaknesses, and realized that many of these attributes were also learned in school. I saw a definite connection between the teachers who loved the work — loved their careers, loved their subject matter and loved their students — and my own learning in the classes they taught.

Something clicked in me. Upon graduation, I felt an urge to become a teacher. It was a difficult decision that took me a few months and some urging by my educator mother to commit myself to that type of torture and disrespect. I decided to drive an hour from my home and take the test. I aced it.

My first day of teaching, I had very high ideals and very little training and experience. That first school year was the hardest of my life. I struggled with classroom management, lesson planning and relating to the other teachers. I felt defeated, and I left the profession to pursue a master’s degree and career in publishing in New York City.

During the two years I lived and worked in New York, I was haunted by my failure as a teacher. I thought of classroom management techniques and new ways to engage students. I thought about how I was so harsh and unfeeling with my past teachers without knowing what they were really going through. These were constant concerns of mine, until one day my wife advised that if I was going to obsess about it, I should return to teaching.

That was all I needed. I immediately returned to Los Angeles, and to the teaching profession. This time it was very different. I was able to manage my class, and I was teaching with a fervor and success that made me forget the trials and tribulations of my first year. It was my calling. On the heels of this success, I remembered what my own education was like and decided I needed to work with children in high-risk areas and low-performing schools. They are why I teach.

Throughout all these years in the classroom, I have sought out and assisted students in the worst socio-economic situations. I enjoy them and never tire of them. There is never a dull moment. They motivate me to be the best teacher for them, in spite of their protestations and refusals to allow me into their lives and minds. It is a constant struggle to reach them, but when I do, I feel strong, proud, successful, vital and needed. In my past, I was chasing dollar signs and notoriety without meaning. My students have given me reason, purpose and triumph that no money could buy.

I teach for students who have no fathers or male role models. I teach for children who know neither who they are nor what they want to be. I teach for parents who think teachers do not care. I teach because I care, and because I want to, and because I am needed. This is why I teach.

Lincoln Johnson is a special education mathematics instructor at Locke Launch to College Academy in South Los Angeles.

Reason, Purpose & Triumph

By Lincoln Duane Johnson
A Song for Anti-Bullying

WHEN STUDENTS ARE BULLIED, THEY ARE OFTEN RELUCTANT to let teachers and parents know. Children need to learn at an early age that it’s okay to let others know that they need help. This activity involves a simple song that can help younger students deal with the issue of bullying and bullies. Before singing the song, share a simple definition of “What is bullying?” The melody we use is from a common song that most children know: “If You’re Happy and You Know It Clap Your Hands.” Lyrics were created by Francie Shafer with teachers Dani Davis and Leslie Johnson. Directions for actions to accompany the song are in parentheses.

THE ANTI-BULLYING SONG
If you need help with a bully, CLAP your hands (Clap twice, 1, 2) If you need help with a bully, CLAP your hands If you need help with a bully and can’t talk to anybody If you need help with a bully, CLAP your hands If you’re happy with yourself, GIVE a smile If you’re happy with yourself and can GIVE others help If you’re happy with yourself, GIVE a smile If you’re happy with yourself and can GIVE others help If you’re happy with yourself, then LEND a hand If you’re happy with yourself, then LEND a hand

FOR MORE GREAT elementary song ideas, order Teaching Tolerance’s free kit I Will Be Your Friend: Songs and Activities for Young Peacemakers at www.tolerance.org

Using a familiar song with a rhythmic beat can inspire students to use alternatives to bullying situations rather than resorting to name-calling or fighting. It could also serve as an introduction to this serious topic. Providing a few clues as signals to defuse a situation may help students lose the “bystander syndrome” that perpetuates bullying.

Francie Shafer
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, Illinois

The Color of Freedom

WE DEVELOPED A UNIT BASED ON COMMON CHILDREN’S books on the Underground Railroad and the Civil Rights Movement. For each book we created a vocabulary list, active learning options and higher order thinking questions. This helped us develop our unit on these topics to make the content more substantive and the history more engaging. There are plenty of books in your school library that will work with this approach. As an example, we chose Margot Theis Raven’s Night Boat to Freedom ($6.99 at www.macmillan.com) to make the Underground Railroad come alive. The book tells the story of 12-year-old Christmas John and his Granny Judith. Granny was enslaved when strangers lured her to their ship with a piece of red flannel. Now on a Kentucky plantation, the two aid other slaves in escaping across the river to the free state of Ohio. John rows the slaves to freedom and, because of his young age, he avoids notice. Each day as Granny makes a quilt, John asks, “What color is freedom tonight?”

Pull out key vocabulary words and concepts, but also pay attention to author’s language and use of figures of speech. Here are some examples from Night Boat to Freedom: dye pots, banks of thread, indigo, pine straw, bay leaves, “feeble as a baby” (simile), rawhide, “peaceful as a baby’s cradle” (simile). We find it best to personally respond to the text ourselves as a way that develops higher order thinking questions that will engage students. Here are the ones we developed for Night Boat to Freedom:

How did the color red steal Granny Judith away from Africa? What color do you imagine freedom to be? Why do you choose that color as the freedom color? What images does the author use to describe how quietly Granny and John talk by the fireplace? Why did the people escaping need to use passwords and codes? What character traits does John possess? What older person do you know who would send you off to freedom? Strategically using children’s literature is a way to bring history alive. And the great news is that your own school library is full of amazing books!

Judy Roberts
Hanover College
Hanover, Indiana

Lewis James
Southwestern Elementary School
Montgomery, AL 36104

LEARN MORE ABOUT the Underground Railroad at www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad

The Color of Freedom

Judy Roberts
Hanover College
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LEARN MORE ABOUT the Underground Railroad at www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad

Judy Roberts
Hanover College
Hanover, Indiana

WRITE FOR US
We welcome submissions of Activity Exchange items from classroom teachers. Submissions (up to 400 words) should include concise information on specific activities. Payment of $200-$300 is made for each Activity Exchange item we publish. For submission guidelines, go to www.tolerance.org/blog/submit-learning-ideas/activity-exchange
Gender Stereotyping Awareness

DURING MY CAREER UNIT WITH SEVENTH-GRADERS, I TAKE the opportunity to look at gender stereotyping in the work force. After students have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with careers, I challenge their learning with a game similar to the old game show “Password.”

I tell students that I will be attaching an index card with the name of a job onto their back (painter’s tape works fairly well). Students will then be given an opportunity to mingle within the classroom getting clues to the job with which they’ve been labeled. Students look at the back of a peer and talk to them the way they would someone in that profession. They can refer to the schooling that is needed to obtain that particular job or to the special equipment they might use if they did that job. I usually model how to ask questions without giving the job away.

I tell students that I will be attaching an index card with the name of a job onto their back (painter’s tape works fairly well). Students will then be given an opportunity to mingle within the classroom getting clues to the job with which they’ve been labeled. Students look at the back of a peer and talk to them the way they would someone in that profession. They can refer to the schooling that is needed to obtain that particular job or to the special equipment they might use if they did that job. I usually model how to ask questions without giving the job away.

To challenge students’ gender bias, females in class are given stereotypical male jobs like plumber, firefighter and construction manager. Meanwhile, males are assigned jobs like librarian, nurse or flight attendant. Most students accurately guess what the job they’ve been labeled with quite quickly, but usually not without an air of disgust. My female students have responded, for instance, in a horrified tone, “Plumber! Yuck!” Male students scratch their faces in disbelief at the thought of a female librarian. Meanwhile, males are assigned quite quickly, but usually not without an air of disgust. My female students have responded, for instance, in a horrified tone, “Plumber! Yuck!” Male students scratch their faces in disbelief at the thought of a female librarian.

I then take the opportunity to review the definition of a stereotype. We discuss how subtle and overt messages sometimes unintentionally are given to males and females as to what careers they can choose. The lesson ends with the recognition that interests and aptitudes—not gender—should guide people to their careers. You can extend this lesson to discuss the effects of gender on education, paychecks and politics.

Mollie Surguine
Sonoran Sky School
Glendale, Arizona

The Resurgence of Hate

IN RECENT YEARS THERE HAS BEEN A RESURGENCE IN THIS country of hate groups. Why have these groups been so powerful in American history and why are they gaining in popularity now? It is a good time to revisit the events of the past and help students link these lessons to their lives today. The purpose of this activity is to take a look at one of the most famous hate groups, try to understand why its members believe the way they do and learn what can be done to stop hate groups from returning to their historic levels of power and influence.

Begin by showing a 2-minute video clip from the National Geographic channel on the brief history of the Klan — KKK: Inside American Terror (http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/series/inside/3964/Overview?Hub-Videos/00045.000). After viewing the video, allow students to read the Newsweek article “rebranding hate in the age of Obama” (available at www.newsweek.com/id/195083).

Have students look for the answers to the following questions:

Q: According to the video, what groups did the Klan target during its resurgence in the early 20th century? A: African Americans and immigrants from predominantly Catholic countries.

Q: Prior to the 2008 election, which group had the Klan and similar hate groups begun targeting and why? A: Latino immigrants, to capitalize on fear of losing jobs.

Q: Have there been any other examples of backlashes against immigrant groups over job loss fears in American history? A: Chinese American, Japanese American, Italian American and many other groups).

Q: Why did public support of hate groups rapidly decline during the Civil Rights era? A: Answers will vary but should refer to the graphic images shown in media during the Civil Rights Movement.

Q: What effects did 9/11 have on hate groups in America? A: Answers will vary but will contain thoughts such as increased hate attacks against Arab and Muslim immigrants.

A good assignment for a critical reflection paper would be, “Why do you think that hate groups—predominantly target people of color or immigrants and blame them for economic problems that they are not responsible for?”

Mike Hollis
Texas State University
San Marcos, Texas
What Does it Mean to be an American?

American literature is the foundation of our 11th-grade English curriculum. Over the course of the year, we visit many pieces of literature and discuss many themes. The focus is to begin considering how the literature we explore reflects our society and our experiences. To this end, I ask students to contemplate one of two questions: What does it mean to be an American? What do people mean when they say “the American dream?”

Students are placed in heterogeneous groups of three or four and asked to brainstorm notions of what it means to be an American and what possible criteria define “the American dream.” The research must include:

- Connections to class readings
- Primary and secondary resources
- One personal interview from the community
- A “Search” section, which discusses the research process, rationale for choosing materials and how their resources shaped their ideas
- A “What I Learned” section, in which students reveal their conclusions
- “Connections and Conclusions” — a summary of the group’s conclusions

Students can present their collective findings in panel discussions — and discuss their different points of view on these questions.

Timothy Fletcher
Washington High School
South Bend, Indiana

LINGUISTIC PROFILING
www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FLdHYTMyfE&feature=related

Q: What type of discrimination did the person on the video suffer?
Q: How do you think the person feels?
Q: Why does he have to change his accent?
Q: In what ways is linguistic profiling harmful?

LINGUISTIC DISCRIMINATION

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FLdHYTMyfE&feature=related

Q: Can you tell a person’s race by the sound of their voice?
Q: Have you ever experienced discrimination based on the sound of your voice?

TV SHOWS

Q: What television shows can you think of that perpetuate linguistic stereotypes?
Q: What do these stereotypes do to the people who are being stereotyped?

As a final project, have students come up with a definition about linguicism based on all the information they’ve learned. Ask them to create a skit that combats linguicism.

Tanya Madrid-Campbell
and Julianne Hughes
The Berkeley School
Berkeley, California

WHAT WE KNOW EACH OTHER’S NAMES, BUT DO WE KNOW THE STORIES OF OUR NAMES?

To begin this activity I give students a piece of paper and have them write their name on it in big, bold letters. I have each student tell the story of how they received their name. After this, I ask students, “How important is language?” Most of us would agree that language is important in our society. The ways we communicate and speak are ways for others to know a little bit about who we are. But how accurate are our perceptions when language is all we have?

Next, I break students into small groups and tell them that they are to create a skit that reveals their answers to the following questions:

Q: What does a smart person sound like?
Q: What does an unintelligent person sound like?
Q: What does a villain sound like?
Q: What does a hero sound like?

After the skits, students reflect and discuss the following:

Q: What patterns do you notice in the way each group described its person?
Q: How important is language in determining someone’s intelligence?
Q: Where do we get our perceptions about intelligence and language?
Q: What if someone doesn’t speak a language “correctly?” Does that mean they are not smart?
Q: What about accents? What does it mean to have a Southern accent, a New York accent or a foreign accent?

Linguicism

We all know each other’s names, but do we know the stories of our names? To begin this activity I give students a piece of paper and have them write their name on it in big, bold letters. I have each student tell the story of how they received their name. After this, I ask students, “How important is language?” Most of us would agree that language is important in our society. The ways we communicate and speak are ways for others to know a little bit about who we are. But how accurate are our perceptions when language is all we have?

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Q: What about accents? What does it mean to have a Southern accent, a New York accent or a foreign accent?

Use relevant video clips from the Internet or TV shows to explore linguicism further, along with a few discussion questions. Here are a few examples:

LINGUISTIC PROFILING

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FLdHYTMyfE&feature=related

Q: What type of discrimination did the person on the video suffer?
Q: How do you think the person feels?
Q: Why does he have to change his accent?
Q: In what ways is linguistic profiling harmful?

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Tanya Madrid-Campbell
and Julianne Hughes
The Berkeley School
Berkeley, California
Toward a More Civil Discourse

New curriculum offers step-by-step lessons for engaging in effective argument on divisive issues

By KATE SHUSTER, Ph.D.

In a ragged session of the U.S. Congress on the topic of health care reform, a U.S. Representative yells, “YOU LIE!” at the President of the United States.

As a health care reform rally in California opposing factions "escalate their arguments" until fists fly and one man, bitten off another man’s finger.

In a marquee match at the U.S. Open, tennis player Serena Williams "goes off" on a line judge, hurling foul language and threats over a foot-fault call.

Five Tips for Bringing Current and Controversial Events into the Classroom

1. Select an issue

Try to choose current events that have meaningful connections to other course content. For example, if you are reading Farewell to Manzanar, you might consider following this with a short unit on Guantánamo Bay. In integrating current events into your classroom, start with less controversial issues. Keep in mind that you’re trying to teach students how to be effective democratic citizens, and that a good way to begin is with more manageable issues as training wheels.

2. Break it down

Consider the component parts of the issue. If you want to discuss the death penalty, you may need to teach students about the criminal justice system, including the difference between state and federal jurisdictions. Younger students are unlikely to understand concepts like “deterrence” and “retribution,” which will make it harder for them to grapple with multiple perspectives on the issue. Breaking the issue into parts will allow you to sequence your unit appropriately and choose materials to assist in learning key concepts.

3. Build the vocabulary

Don’t forget to include vocabulary lessons as part of your current events instruction. Just as you would any other instructional topics. Keep a running list from readings and research.

4. Select the readings

For many teachers, this is one of the hardest parts of current events instruction – finding readings that are both accessible and challenging. You’ll have to read a lot of articles, chapters and other materials in order to find readings that will represent a balanced and informed set of perspectives. But, the upside is that you’ll probably need only a few readings to create a meaningful context for students to be able to discuss the issue.

5. Finish with focus

There should be something that students do with their current events information, some sort of culminating activity. This could be writing an informative or persuasive essay, working on a group presentation or project, engaging in roundtable discussions or debates, or any other activity that gives students the opportunity to synthesize what they’ve learned and discussed. Perhaps students could write letters to the editor of a newspaper, stating their position on an issue, or write responses to an editorial that they read, agreeing or disagreeing with the author.
The Only One

Where schools are still separate and unequal, parents often look beyond their local school for solutions. But when you’re the only person of color in your class, school can become a struggle between two worlds.

By AFI-ODELIA E. SCRUGGS

Two Worlds: A Struggle Between School Can Become Color in Your Class, Only Person of When You’re the Only One

For parents of color, there is often an unease and question: Do I send my child to a school where she will be in a minority of one? Educators say Hall’s story is far too common among students who are the only ones in their school or class. Minority children in schools where there are few, if any, of their ethnicity or racial group battle to balance the various worlds they inhabit.

Fabiana Kimberly-Silva, a college student in Santa Barbara, Calif., said she was the only Bolivian when she attended middle and high school. While seeking acceptance from Mexicans and Anglo students and staff, she almost lost her culture.

“I had faced discrimination and racism from Mexicans in school because they didn’t understand my culture. They saw me as an intruder,” she said. “And also from white Americans because I was a Latina and they usually thought I was Mexican.”

“I had to adapt to these cultures by interacting with both, mixing my Spanish with the Mexican way of talking and learning English at the same time.”

Silva said the prejudice made her question her abilities, but her mother and school counselors supported her. Jarrod Schwartz, the executive director of Just Communities, a social justice organization in Santa Barbara, said he often hears doubts voiced by high-achieving Latino students who, like Silva, end up in advanced placement courses in the city’s public schools.

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On the other hand, the same students feel used by people who point to their academic success to deny the existence of racism.

“High-achieving Latino students will be brought [out] and celebrated, and we don’t see the price until we get with them and talk to them,” Schwartz said.

That’s because students of color who are the only ones, or one of a few, often become the representative for their race or ethnicity, researchers say.

“You’re expected to represent and explain your group, be responsible for your group’s actions,” said Ronald Chennault, an associate professor in the department of education policy studies at DePaul University in Chicago.

Tia Hall believes students solve this dilemma by developing what she calls “the chameleon complex,” as they change their appearance, speech and demeanor when they change environments, but they find they still cannot live up to everyone’s expectations.

“We black children have TV expectations of black people, for example, you have this hipness. You’re all about jokes and rhymes and hip hop,” she said. “You’ve got blacks saying, ‘You think you’re white,’ and white kids saying, ‘What kind of black kid are you that you don’t do this?’”

Hall didn’t turn to her parents. She knew they’d urge her to be grateful for the chance to attend a top-tier school even if she felt isolated among the predominantly white student body.

She never forgot how it felt to be the “only one.” As an adult, she married a man who’d had a similar school experience. The two thought long and hard before sending their children into the same situation.

In the end, though, the North Carolina couple did decide to send their four children to a small private school. Hall’s son is one of four students of color attending the high school. (She asked that the school not be identified.)

“We really struggled with whether to go that route. Because we are very hands-on with schools, it has worked to a certain point,” she said.

Tia Hall is not alone. When parents have the power to choose the school their children attend, tough questions follow. What values will my child learn here? How do I know they will be welcome? For parents of color, there is often an added question: Do I send my child to a school where she will be in a minority of one?

Educators say Hall’s story is far too common among students who are the only ones in their school or class. Minority children in schools where there are few, if any, of their ethnicity or racial group battle to balance the various worlds they inhabit.

Fabiana Kimberly-Silva, a college student in Santa Barbara, Calif., said she was the only Bolivian when she attended middle and high school. While seeking acceptance from Mexicans and Anglo students and staff, she almost lost her culture.

“I had faced discrimination and racism from Mexicans in school because they didn’t understand my culture. They saw me as an intruder,” she said. “And also from white Americans because I was a Latina and they usually thought I was Mexican.”

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She and her husband decided that talking about racial differences, not ignoring them, was the best way to ensure their children feel comfortable as the “only ones.” She insists that faculty and staff understand that her family often has a different experience and point of view from the majority, and that the point of view is valid.

That’s why, for example, she demanded a teacher confront the presence of the n-word, when it came up during the reading of “Sounder.”

“I approached the teacher, because you can’t have a book like that and not deal with the word,” Hall said.

She said other parents should adopt a similar assertiveness, if their children are “the only ones.”

“We black people shouldn’t be ashamed to have these conversations,” she said. “I’m a consumer, and I have just as much right to speak to the quality of my child’s education.”

Illustration by Scott Bakal
In third grade, Julia Horsman’s entire science project consisted of being herded outside with the other kids with disabilities and rolling soda cans down a ramp, some empty, some full, to see which would travel farther and faster.

Fast-forward a year.

This time, her science project involved freezing water, juice and milk, seeing which one froze the fastest. She poured and measured and gave a presentation about her results. And she did it all on her own.

Same kid — one who, according to the state of Maryland, has mild mental retardation.

Two very different classrooms.

Into the Mainstream
It has been more than 30 years since the federal government first declared that children with different abilities shouldn’t be automatically separated from one another in school. Julia Horsman’s parents, and others all over the country, are still fighting to have the law enforced. Too often, they say, school administrators’ first instincts are separation, not inclusion.

“But when you read the law it’s so clear cut,” says Julia’s mother, Lisa Horsman.

The problem is that the radical changes the law promised never sunk in at the ground level — namely, in teacher-education programs, says Kathleen Whitbread, an associate professor of education at Saint Joseph College in Connecticut.

The latest figures from the U.S. Department of Education show that, overall, almost 57 percent of students with disabilities spend the majority of their day in traditional classrooms. But that number masks a wide range of outcomes for a diverse group of students. For students with mental retardation, for example, the inclusion rate is less than 16 percent.

“Change is slow, yes,” Whitbread says, “but this is ridiculous.”

When Whitbread was studying to be a teacher in the early 1980s, her special education classes didn’t include teachers learning to be math or kindergarten or chemistry teachers.

“All of the students in my classes were special-ed teachers,” she said. “We were focusing on things like behavioral modification, functional skills, teaching kids how to tie their shoes and brush their teeth.”

Then she met an inclusion activist who put things in perspective for her.

“She said, ‘Is the child breathing?’ Then they belong in a regular class.” Whitbread says. “I think that people respond to the civil rights argument, that it’s wrong to separate children. Would you put all the blue-eyed children in one classroom? Of course you wouldn’t.”

While St. Joseph and a small number of teacher-training programs no longer have separate tracks for special education teachers and everyone else, Whitbread says the combined approach remains uncommon.

And she and other advocates say the time has passed — though not everyone has accepted it — for special education to be thought of as a place, instead of a service.

“Teaching is about taking the child that you get and using what you’ve learned to teach this child,” Whitbread says. “This is what we should have been doing in 1976.”

The Case for Inclusion

Early on, Julia was in a separate classroom but the teacher seemed passionate and her daughter seemed to be learning, Lisa Horsman recalled. Isolated, but educated.

Then the teachers seemed to stop caring. And Julia stopped learning.

“I went in there to watch one day and the teacher said ‘Let’s go back to the reading we were reading yesterday,'” Horsman said. “They had nothing to look at, nothing to follow. They were seven or eight little zombies sitting there, with their desks cleared off.

And Julia languished in that separate room — where all the other students were boys — she decided she couldn’t let the school district in Prince George’s County, Maryland, make decisions for her anymore.

“I [had done] what I thought was best for my kid, what the doctors told me, what the school told me,” she says. “And I was punished for it.”

Horsman called the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education, where attorney Selene Almazan took on Julia’s case.

“I represented families who want their children to go to their neighborhood school,” Almazan says. “Really, it’s just an enforcement of what their child is legally entitled to.”

“There’s been some progress,” she says, but “it is not uniform across the country. There is this whole idea that with kids with disabilities, you need to take care of them. It really is rather paternalistic in many ways, rather than looking at each individual child. I’m hard-pressed to find where there’s good education in these segregated classrooms.”

It’s no wonder, she says, that many schools continue to assume these same children won’t be successful in a regular classroom, she says.

“I’ve found that the opposite is true,” she says. “And with Julia.

And an experience like Julia’s is possible only if schools put in the effort to make inclusion meaningful. When his class read Shakespeare, she found something called “No Fear Shakespeare,” which had the original text on one side of the page and its modern English translation on the other.

“How many kids is that important to? Sabia says. “To broaden his horizons. To have common experiences. To see what he likes and to shape what he is going to do. When he’s on the subway and he sees a picture of Shakespeare, he knows who that is.”

Getting through The Catcher in the Rye was particularly difficult, she says, because she couldn’t find this novel — centered on one character’s feelings of alienation — in any other format. Still, her son plodded through it. And the experience stuck with Steve, a boy the Maryland school system wanted to teach how to sweep floors, run a washing machine and cook.

“He likes the band Green Day, and they have this song, ‘Who Wrote Holden Caulfield?’” she says. “He knew what that was.”

Sadia says the development of curricula designed for all kinds of learners is finally happening on a large scale, such as Universal Design for Learning, created by the Center for Applied Special Technology in Massachusetts. It offers a blueprint for educators working with students with varying needs.

“Their idea is the curriculum is what’s broken, not kids,” she says. “Schools should look at who are in their classes now. We’re not designing curriculum for them all.”

Even without an investment in a readymade curriculum like Universal Design, the inclusion process might go more smoothly if all teachers in a school were to collaborate, Whitbread says.

Well-trained special education teachers already know many unique ways to reach children who have different learning styles, Whitbread says. If one approach doesn’t work, they will know of another.

But if individual classroom teachers continue to be confronted with reinventing these approaches each time they
Learning the Ways of the World

For Julia Horsman, life at her old school, in that separate classroom, was lonely. As the only girl, she was already isolated. She learned some vulgar words from the boys in her class, which she repeated at home. Her sweet temperament turned sullen. She stopped smiling, says her mother.

But school district administrators warned that Julia would be just as isolated in a regular classroom. They said she would fail. They said she would be miserable.

The Horsmans consulted a neuropsychologist, who had a different vision. He expected Julia to blossom, and predicted that other kids would be nurturing.

“She was just as isolated in a regular classroom. They said she would be miserable,” says Sharon Leonard, an educational consultant at the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network. Instead, Leonard says, teachers should see special education as a service they bring to the student. “We can’t get a better placement than that general education classroom.”

The teachers in the special-ed classroom “don’t hear it anymore,” Davis-Killian says, while in a regular classroom, it wouldn’t be tolerated. “That behavior will incredibly limit what you can do in life,” she says.

From her life of inclusion, Lisa has learned hip lingo, and she knows how to send text messages to her friends—and how to delete the cell phone so her mother doesn’t know she made calls after bedtime.

“It’s not that she doesn’t do anything different—she does have Down syndrome,” her mother says. “But that’s the aspect that inclusion can’t quantify. She still doesn’t realize that she’s different.”

Separate But Effective?

In recent years, gender-segregated schools have become popular in the United States. "Inclusion can't quantify: She still doesn't realize it wouldn't be tolerated. "That behavior will incredibly limit what you can do in life," she says."

The movement is based on the hypothesis that hard-wired behaviors that can draw attention to a particular disability aren't curbed in segregated classrooms, she says.

Like many people with cognitive disabilities, Lisa had her own soothing behavior. Lisa would put her head down and make a humming noise.

“It took me and the school two years of saying, ‘Get your head up to stop her from doing that,’” she says. “I saw another girl in a segregated classroom and watched for 15 minutes as she hummed to herself. She was 6. Nobody ever said anything.”

She knows she can’t just go walking into class whenever she wants.” Davis-Killian says.

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“The teacher said, ‘Whenever I would tell the kids to pair up, everybody would be fighting over Julia.’” Almazan, who helped get Julia into her inclusive setting, notes that Julia didn’t just raise her reading level during her first year in a regular classroom.

“She got birthday party invitations,” Almazan says. “When a child is a part of the classroom and accepted by peers, peers get it. Kids know when another child needs help. Kids are the ones that can tell another kid, ‘You’re not supposed to hit.’”

For now, Julia Horsman is just one of the kids at her school. Julia still takes time out of class for occupational therapy, so she can master things like opening zippers, but otherwise, her mom says, “I almost forget she’s in special ed. There’s so much less fighting to do.”

At a parent-teacher organization meeting last school year, Lisa Horsman ran into Julia’s principal, Justin FitzGerald.

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Teacher’s Day Essay

Sex segregation doesn’t make public schools more like private schools. It’s because of their resources, not because they’re single sex,” said Dr. Jack Martin, Deputy Director of the ACLU Women’s Rights Project. He now lives in Alaska where he works as a freelance journalist.

“School districts across the country are experimenting with sex-separated programs, which rely on questionable brain science theories based on outdated gender stereotypes,” said the ACLU’s Martin. “Instead, these districts should focus on efforts that we know can improve all students’ education, like smaller classes and more teacher training and parental involvement.”

David Holtzhouse is the former Senior Editor of the SPLC’s Intelligence Project. He now lives in Alaska where he works as a freelance journalist.
So much depends on a yellow bus, winding its way across the North Carolina landscape. For decades, this was how Wake County integrated its schools. Buses would pick up public school students in largely minority communities along the Raleigh Beltline; in affluent Cary, a Raleigh suburb; in dozens of small towns and unincorporated communities around this fast growing state capital. Most of the students would travel to schools not far from home. But every year, a few would cross the county to a new school, in a neighborhood very different from their own. The system won Wake County praise from many integration advocates — but locally, people were less enchanted. In late 2008, a wave of anti-busing sentiment swept in new school board members who promised to support neighborhood schools and keep kids closer to home.

Cathy Truitt worries about what will happen next. “If we end busing abruptly, we’ll be taking a rapid step back to resegregation,” said Truitt, a retired teacher who was defeated in her bid for a school board seat. While Truitt worries about the effects of an end to busing, she says voters were exasperated with a system that seemed to randomly reassign their children to schools far from home. “A child could be reassigned for three out of four years, while another family would go untouched,” Truitt said.

“While people embraced diversity, they were absolutely tired of losing their choices.”

The New Segregation
Stories like that are bound to get a reaction from Amy Stuart Wells. A professor at Teachers College at Columbia University, Wells has spent much of her career studying the resegregation of American schools — writing the history of the steady march back to separateness that has left our educational system more racially segregated now than it was in 1968. “We don’t have to accept this juxtaposition that puts school choice on one side and a civil rights approach to integration on the other,” Wells said. “Our approaches to school choice over the past 20 years have been pretty unimaginative — and children are paying for our lack of imagination.”

For Wells and other experts on school integration, the Wake County school board election is just another phase in a long-term, city-by-city struggle over how to integrate our schools. It’s a struggle that the entire country has been losing for the better part of two decades.

Today, one-third of black students attend school in places where the black population is more than 90 percent. A little less than half of white students attend schools that are more than 90 percent white. One-third of all black and Latino

Unmaking Brown

America’s schools are more segregated now than they were in the late 1960s. More than 50 years after Brown v. Board of Education, we need to radically rethink the meaning of “school choice.”

BY TIM LOCKETTE

Illustration by Mick Wiggins
students attend high-poverty schools (where more than 75 percent of students receive free or reduced lunch); only 4 percent of white children do.

Things have been a bit better, and not so long ago. In 1990 more than 40 percent of black students in the South were attending majority-white schools. Today, fewer than 30 percent of students do — roughly the same percentage as in the late 1960s, when many districts were still refusing to implement 1954’s Brown v. Board of Education.

That trend isn’t limited just to the South, according to Gary Orfield, director of the Civil Rights Project at UCLA. According to Orfield, some of the deepest racial divisions in America today are in the Midwest, where old patterns of “white flight” have shaped the suburban landscape, and a new generation of immigrants is settling into communities that were never under orders to desegregate.

Most of the decades-old obstacles to integration still remain. Wake County’s debate over active integration measures is a rarity these days: Most busing programs were killed by white backlash in the 1970s. Our schools are still governed by a hodgepodge of districts, some giant and some tiny, many of which were created as enclaves of white privilege. And Americans still are choosing — or being steered toward — home ownership in communities where everyone looks like them.

And there are new challenges. In 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court effectively gutted Brown by declaring that school districts can’t consider racial diversity as a factor in school assignments. (Where busing still exists, it’s done on the basis of family income.) And as the suburbs have spread, we’ve seen residential segregation on steroids.

“The old paradigm of black cities and white suburbs is no longer true,” said Orfield. “Black and Latino communities are expanding into the suburbs — but they’re concentrated in specific areas. We’re seeing a suburbia that is divided by ethnicity.”

And increasingly there is “triple segregation” as English language learners in poverty find themselves concentrated in certain schools.

“This schools are just fundamentally different from other schools,” said Erica Frankenberg, a scholar on the Civil Rights Project. “These schools have been pretty unimaginative and, we need to realize that this is a crisis that is well known to many people of color. Frankenberg says it’s time for the entire country to realize that this is a crisis for each of us.

“After we don’t start educating black and Latino students better than we are doing now, we are going to see an intergenerational decline in the percentage of high school graduates in the adult population for the first time ever,” she noted.

There’s strong evidence that integration could help us eliminate the “achievement gap.” Frankenberg and Orfield both note that the gap was lowest during the late 1960s and early 1990s — the period in history when our schools were at their most integrated.

“You have never been able to implement Plessy v. Ferguson,” Frankenberg said. “Separate schools have never been equal. Yet we keep trying to make a segregated system work.”

A Hidden History of Choice

How do we reverse a 40-year trend, one that is embedded in our residential landscape? And how do we integrate schools when the Supreme Court has ruled that race and diversity can’t be a factors in school assignments?

The solution might be as simple as changing the way we think — particularly the way we think about school choice. “We need to rethink what choice means, and we need to realize that it isn’t inimical to the civil rights’ approach to integration,” Wells said.

Experts such as Wells and Orfield point out that many fundamentals of school segregation haven’t changed all that much since 1990. There was residential segregation then, and many racially homogeneous districts date back to the 1970s. What did change was a paradigm shift. Court rulings weakened local integration plans, and Americans increasingly began looking for solutions that appealed to their free-market instincts.

Charter schools and vouchers began to look like the best way to liberate students from intensely segregated schools — and the best way to create innovative, effective schools.

By and large, it hasn’t worked, Orfield contends.

“Charter schools are the most segregated segment of the school system,” he said. “They often appear in highly segregated areas, and they tend to increase segregation.”

Again, so much depends on a yellow bus. By not providing transportation and other services commonly found in traditional public schools, charters were limiting their student body to kids who lived nearby — and to parents who had the right social networks.

“With charters, recruitment is largely word-of-mouth, and, as a result, these schools aren’t as accessible as they could be,” Wells said.

Orfield notes that charters aren’t bound by civil rights mandates, the way magnet schools are. But even magnet schools — with their implied mission of providing alternatives — don’t have enough capacity to provide parents with a true choice. With waiting lists at every magnet, it’s the schools that are doing the selecting.

“The laissez-faire, market-based approaches of the past 20 years have done a really good job of providing schools with a choice of students,” Wells said. “But they haven’t done

“Our approaches to school choice over the past 20 years have been pretty unimaginative — and children are paying for our lack of imagination.”
a good job of providing students with a choice of schools.” It didn’t have to be that way, Wells said.

“The problem is that there’s a whole history of school choice that has been hidden and forgotten,” she said.

Wells recently co-authored a major study on school systems that still have voluntary busing. Eight major cities — including Indianapolis, St. Louis, Palo Alto and others — still have voluntary busing systems that allow students from intensely segregated schools to choose to attend other schools — even across district lines.

“These programs aren’t thriving — in fact, they’re struggling, politically, to survive — but they’re hanging on in large part because of support from parents,” Wells said.

That includes parents in white, affluent suburbs who want students from other districts to be brought into their schools.

“A lot of white parents in the suburbs bemoan the fact that they’re raising kids in an all-white, privileged context,” Wells said. “Even the kids realize they’re in this bubble.”

For Wells, the voluntary busing programs represent an approach to school choice that once was well known — one most parents have forgotten, or believe to be a failure. And that’s a shame, she said, because for students in these programs, the achievement gap has shrunk.

“Not only do these programs provide meaningful choices, they provide the intangibles — high expectations, higher achievement, the achievement gap has shrunk. Wells said.

The problem is that there’s a whole history of school choice that has been hidden and forgotten,” she said. “And teachers need to be prepared share what they know — to explain why diversity is important.”

What Educators Can Do

Teach the history of resegregation. Encourage students to research what factors have led to resegregation. Have them ask adults about their memories of school (keeping in mind that schools were at their least segregated 20 years ago). Have them ask parents how they decided where to live.

Know how to respond to bias incidents. When bias incidents — or rumors of them — go unacknowledged and unaddressed, they can grow into ugly controversies that brand a school as an unsafe place. Fear of racial tension is a factor in driving parents away from diverse school. Orfield says. “In the early days of integration, everyone knew you had to address this,” he said. “We seem to have forgotten the importance of in-school race relations.”

Testify. The educational benefits of a diverse learning environment are well-documented, but the public often doesn’t see diversity as a “must have” in a school. Share your own class-room experiences with the public, and help shift the paradigm.

Rethinking Districts

Wells is quick to point out that these are programs that bus students from one district to another. School district boundaries, she says, are “the new Jim Crow,” separating poverty from wealth and white from black and brown.

Frankenberg agrees. She notes that the most segregated states today are the ones with the most profusion of districts — a legacy of a post-Brown movement to establish white and affluent enclaves in the shadow of major cities.

Frankenberg, who grew up in Mobile, uses her home state as an example. Alabama has 67 counties and 167 school districts. Neighboring Florida also has 67 counties — and 69 districts (one for each county and two special districts for university laboratory schools.) According to Frankenberg, Alabama is the most segregated state in the South — the only Southern state that consistently shows up in the top 10 of most segregated states.

Consolidating districts in highly segregated areas might be a difficult political battle, but complete consolidation isn’t the only option.

“We need to rethink our attitude toward districts,” Wells says. “The boundaries can be more permeable than they are now.”

In an age of economic hardship, that approach may be more welcome than ever before. Wells points to Long Island, New York, which has 125 individual school districts.

“People are starting to understand that this system is wasteful,” she said. “Districts are starting to talk about saving money by consolidating back-office operations. There’s even talk about consolidating certain employment functions, though I’m not sure the union will approve of that.”

“If districts can share these services, why can’t we find ways to allow students to attend school across district lines?” she said. “Why can’t we create interdistrict magnet programs?”

A Paradigm Shift

Wells, Orfield and Frankenberg all say they’re hopeful things will change now that America has its first black president. So far, though, the signals from the Obama Administration have been mixed.

Wells says she hopes a new generation of research on the benefits of a diverse education will help “put integration and civil rights back on the public radar.” She cites the work of Scott E. Page, a mathematician who has used computer models to show that diverse groups of thinkers come up with better solutions than homogenous groups.

But the testimony of teachers and parents is just as important. If debates like the one in Wake County reach an unhappy ending, it may be because we’re losing sight of the perspectives that only educators can provide.

“We need to be politically active in seeking a change,” she said. “And teachers need to be prepared share what they know — to explain why diversity is important.”

BY AFI-ODELJA E. SCRUGGS

VICKIE MALONE’S STUDENTS SEE INTEGRATION WHEN THEY GATHER IN HER CLASSROOM at McComb (Mississippi) High School. Black and white youngsters talk and study with peers they’ve known since elementary school. But Malone doesn’t want her students to see integration. She wants them to think about it, to understand their families’ roles in the struggle that, to some extent, continues in their Mississippi town.

She doesn’t want them to learn history; she wants them to do history.

She accomplishes that goal by prodding, poking and challenging her students to develop critical thinking skills. She has them troll through public documents and conduct research, visit civil rights sites, and speak with local leaders. She wants them to be active and engaged. She wants them to think about the significance of the Civil Rights Movement in communities that are still largely segregated.
oral histories with community residents. She pushes them to search and search, until they discover that one answer invariably leads to another question.

Malone’s classroom is located in one of the battlegrounds of the Civil Rights Movement — but her dilemma is one faced by teachers all across the country. ‘The Movement happened here; yet, there’s more that should have happened.’ Jim Crow was outlawed, but much is still separate and still unequal. Schools were integrated, but many lives remain segregated.

For the past three years, Malone has taught a class on her town’s local history, inviting students to find out what really happened and why. “I create an environment that allows them to do the re-search and the thinking,” says Malone, who also teaches psychology and sociology. “But I don’t give them the answers. They arrive here on their own.” It’s her way of adhering her school’s philosophy of teaching with rigor, relevance and relationship. The rigor comes from conducting research and shaping questions. The relevance comes from showing students how events connect with their own lives. The relationships are the bonds between classmates, students and the people they meet and interview.

Two states away, in Louisville, Ky., Louis Bryant worked at accomplishing the same goal during his 14 years teaching African American history at Ballard High School.

His students didn’t have to go outside the classroom to find primary sources; they talked to one another, every time they spoke to Bryant. The Mississippi native was active in the Civil Rights Movement when it came to his home state. (The students) were in awe,” he says. “Their minds are eager to learn, and then someone is standing in front of them who had been a part of the movement. It’s a one-on-one thing,” says Bryant, who now serves as a liaison for the school’s online division.

Bryant and Malone have crafted solutions to a problem that plagues any history teacher: making the past relevant to students thoroughly grounded in the present. But teaching the importance of integration is possibly even more vexing, now that public schools are re-segregating at an increasing pace.

Research by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA revealed that 40 percent of Latinos and 39 percent of African Americans go to “intensely segregated schools.”}

These students are segregated by class as well because “the average black and Latino student is now in a school that has nearly 60 percent of students from families who are near, or below the poverty line,” according to the organization’s January 2009 press release. “After two decades of a hostile Supreme Court, and two terms of a presidency committed to reversing civil rights gains, only the nation’s small towns and rural areas retain substantially integrated schools.”

The trend is evident in Mississippi, which arguably has a dual school system. The public schools are 50 percent African American, 47 percent White and 2 percent Hispanic/Latino. The state also has a sizable system of private schools, most of which have few African American students.

“There are private schools … that have a predominately Caucasian student body, but are in an area that is predominately African American. I think a lot of people are resigned to that reality because they are private schools,” says Scoopy Spears, who directs advanced learning and gifted programs at the Mississippi Department of Education.

“It’s not to say there isn’t a private school option for African Americans, but many can’t afford the tuition, or meet the enrollment requirements,” he says.

Malone and Bryant stand on either side of those lines. Bryant is an African American whose students are predominately white and affluent. Ballard High School is a comprehensive high school that offers courses in six languages, cultural arts and health careers.

Malone is a white teacher whose students are predominately African American, and moderate- to low-income. McComb High School has 815 students, according to its website. The school offers two foreign languages and numerous courses in fine arts.

When it came to civil rights history, however, both said their students shared a trait: ignorance.

“Most of my students came in with no knowledge about the Civil Rights Movement.” Bryant says. “They were blank about it.”

The McComb students bluntly admitted they knew nothing about the tumultuous time in their city.

“They were really facile,” Marcus Spears said in a documentary about the school’s civil rights class. “But when we got into the class, I realized the things that happened, it was right in my own neighborhood.”

Malone blames such lack of knowledge on the way subjects are taught. “The reason they don’t know very much is that they learn certain things for tests. The style is stand and deliver,” she says. “They get the information from the teachers, by and large in a factual way. They haven’t had information down to the level where they own it.”

Malone and Bryant agree that promoting ownership requires a specific setting. The class must be student-centered, where the teacher is a leader or guide instead of an authority.

“I let my students have control of the everyday experience, and lead the discussion,” Bryant says. “I lead into it by question and answer.”

The classroom must also become a safe space, because new students rights history exposes intense and conflicting emotions.

Bryant started his classes by setting ground rules about language and behavior. “I say that philosophy is respect for one’s opinion. It’s a two-way thing you give respect and respect comes back to you,” he says.

He also forbids casual use of racial slurs. “We had to get rid of derogatory terms: the n-word, the cracker word. I’m up front; I let them know we will not use those words, and if the words come up in a book then we will talk about them.”

Malone arranges the classroom so everyone is on equal terms. She’s abandoned desks for a table where she joins the students.

“We sit around and table, and I sit with them so we’re all at eye level. Nobody can look at something else, nobody can lay down on the table,” she says.

In fact, the seating arrangement is one step toward creating community. Malone says she spends at least half of the semester creating a trusting, open atmosphere.

“I spend nine weeks building community, so they get a lot of background about when and why (McComb) began,” she says. By the time students get to what Malone calls “the stuff that’s heavy” — issues of family history and ongoing injustice — students are already accustomed to talking in a frank but sensitive way.

Students start by researching their names, and writing a poem about them. Then they look into their families and create a real narrative. Relating those stories helps break down defenses that students have erected to protect themselves from their situations, and from each other.

“Before they came in the class, there are lots of attitudes from the boys and the girls,” she says. “Once they begin to share from the heart about their own personal experiences, the kids respond [to each other] in such a different way.”

When the walls begin to crumble, Malone sends her students out once more, to ask about their families’ involvement in civil rights. The stories that come back show why creating community is so necessary.

One of her favorites students only shared when Malone insisted. He revealed that his family had once gone through his great-grandfather’s belongings. There, stored in the attic, they found a red Klan robe; the student’s relative was an official in the white supremacist organization.

Malone immediately steered the discussion to the student’s feelings.

“I asked about how it makes you feel to know that and the fact that he’s not responsible (for his great-grandfather’s membership). There’s nothing he can do about it, but the awareness makes him a different person,” she says.

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Soon after the Center on Halsted opened in 2007, Rick Garcia, whose office overlooks Halsted Street, began to notice something troubling. The Center, near downtown Chicago, is perhaps the Midwest’s largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community center. “All of sudden,” says Garcia, political director for the LGBT advocacy group Equality Illinois, “the street was inundated with kids — kids who’d been abandoned by their families, who had nowhere else to go. All I could think was, ‘Why aren’t these babies in school?’”

Chicago’s public school system had a problem. LGBT students were three times more likely than straight peers to miss school because of threats to their safety, according to a 2003 districtwide survey; and students who faced regular harassment were more likely to drop out. For these kids, schools were failing. In fall 2008, Chicago officials took a drastic step. They proposed a “gay-friendly” high school where students of all sexual orientations could learn in bully-free classrooms where a safe and welcoming environment was the norm.

Some gay-rights advocates — including Garcia — publicly questioned whether the district’s plan to protect LGBT students only worked, in reality, to segregate them. “If we create ‘Homo High,’ we don’t have to prohibit this behavior in other schools,” Garcia said recently, recounting his opposition. “The reality is, we have to live as neighbors. We have to learn to tolerate one another, if not accept one another. All our kids should be safe in all our schools; segregation is not the answer.”

Officials eventually withdrew the proposal. If it had passed, the new campus would have opened this September, becoming one of only a handful of LGBT-friendly public high schools in the United States. Anti-gay backlash played a large role in the opposition to Chicago’s proposed Pride Campus. Two other LGBT-friendly schools — New York City’s Harvey Milk High School and The Alliance School in Milwaukee — have also sparked ire from social conservatives.

For some gay-rights advocates, LGBT-oriented schools smack of “separate but equal.” Others believe LGBT-friendly schools offer a refuge and a blueprint — a chance to reach kids whose lives, sometimes literally, are at risk.

“Across the country, folks who support gay rights are starting to think about these issues,” says David Stovall, an associate professor of educational policy studies and African American studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

“In popular culture we’ve seen a shift toward more widespread acceptance of LGBTQ spaces,” Stovall says. “Now we’re at the point where people are asking, should the focus be on taking care of our own concerns, or should we be pushing for a more integrated model?”

The Alliance School

Ninety miles north of Chicago, in a commercial section of central Milwaukee, The Alliance School sits at the back of a parking lot, an older, boxy-looking building the color of gray chalk.

Alliance opened its high school five years ago as part of the small-schools movement. In September, it moved into a bigger building and added a middle school after frequent requests from parents and other educators to expand. The school operates on the Summerhill model — democratic governance, student-led curricula, peer mediation, high academic expectations, no official principal and teachers called by their first names.

Though it’s commonly called Milwaukee’s “gay school,” Tina Owen, Alliance’s lead teacher and founder, is quick to clarify that the school is not about sexual orientation. “We’re about creating a safe space free from bullying,” she says.

Owen prefers the term “open and affirming,” a phrase she borrowed from her church. “We’re open to everyone,” she says, “and everyone is valuable for who they are.”

Owen started Alliance after teaching in another Milwaukee school where administrators did little to address the bullying and harassment of LGBT students. When she proposed Alliance — whose name comes from gay-straight alliance — “some people were skeptical, but we received mostly support. Everyone could remember a time when they didn’t want to go to school because of a bully.”

Alliance is tiny for an urban school, with 20 staff and 166 students. Almost 80 percent of students here qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 40 percent are students of color. While teachers legally cannot survey students’ sexual orientation, they know anecdotally their students who want LGBT kids to learn and live free from harm. For some gay-rights advocates, LGBT-oriented schools smack of “separate but equal.”

Some people argue “gay-friendly” schools offer needless segregation. Others say they’re the only chance some kids have to make it.
represent a diverse mix of orientations and identities. “You can be yourself here,” says Nona, a ninth-grader, “and the teachers help you learn to work together.”

The weekly class representatives’ meeting proves Nona’s point. Six students, a mix of straight, gay and transgender, gather around a table in the empty Spanish classroom, debating themes for the upcoming Homecoming dance. The group includes a teen mom with a nose ring, a pony-tailed girl with tattoos around her neck, and a freshman who frequently pauses to check his hair in a mirrored compact plucked from the bottom of his purse.

They might easily be considered misfits in other schools. They’re the ones who might watch their backs, avoid locker rooms, and feel uneasy in school dances. These are kids who, judged solely by the superficial, might get written off.

“Many of our students were unhappy in school,” says Cindy Crane, executive director of the Wisconsin-based GSA’s for Safe Schools, which supports gay-straight alliances in middle and high schools, finds the segregation argument “almost offensive.”

“Students in minority groups can experience a particular kind of long-term stress that creates barriers to thriving academically and socially,” Crane says. “If there is a way to help students avoid that stress so they can thrive, we should do it.”

Besides, she argues, “the thought that all gay kids would want to flock to a gay school is silly — and mistaken. A gay school might be the answer for some students, but it certainly wouldn’t be the answer for all. Being gay is only one part of our identity. Kids who are gay are also a lot of other things, and there may be other parts of their identity that guide school satisfaction.”

Yet in the beginning, even Owen questioned whether a separate school was wise: “Are we just taking students away from the problem, and leaving the problem there? But I was thinking that the bullying stopped. ‘Growing up, I thought all straight kids were bullies,’ Tarrell says. ‘But I have straight friends here. Here, Tarrell hasn’t missed a day. He seeks out extra credit, loves math and recites the periodic table like most kids were bullies,’” Tarrell says. “But I have straight friends here. ‘I always got picked on,’ says Emiliano Luna, a pink-haired freshman wearing lime green pants. ‘It made me feel so angry, inside and outside.’

Back in Chicago, proponents haven’t given up. A new proposal is in the works, though Stowell says they’ve learned some important lessons.

“I don’t think we were explicit enough the first time around that we were talking about something different. When Stowell says, “There are schools that have no clue how to address LGBT students’ issues and concerns. We can use this campus to help them learn how to address those issues within the walls of their own schools. Therein lies the power.”

CARRIE KILMAN is a writer and activist based in Madison, Wisconsin. She is the author of Epitaph for the Living, a memoir about voice, family and displacement. She received an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Goucher College and a graduate certificate from the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies.

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**LGBT students were seven times more likely than straight kids to skip school to avoid bullying. In all, 61 percent felt unsafe at school.**

Examining the Risk

Bullying for any reason can be harmful. For LGBT kids, the stakes are arguably highest.

According to the National School Climate Survey, released last October by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, almost nine out of 10 LGBT students were bullies, and the school was a dangerous place. The school continues to serve LGBT students at risk of dropping out. Most students report “negative experiences in other schools,” says Harvey Milk principal Alan Nolan. “They’re seeking a safer, more accepting environment.”

Add GilSEN Executive Director Eliza Byard: “Given the inequalities in the existing system, these schools are essential resources of last resort for students who may otherwise not graduate. They fill a vital need.”

I Always Got Picked On

After school on a recent Monday, the basketball club practices in the gym. The musical club watches Rent on a classroom TV. And Alliance sophomore Tarrell Hogle pokes over his science presentation in the computer room.

“It’s hard to call anyone ‘typical’ here, though in many ways, students graduate, whether gay or straight,” says Nona, from Harvey Milk. “I believe that should be every administrator’s goal.”

In Milwaukee, officials are paying close attention to Alliance, turning the school into something of an incubator. Already, several campuses have adopted Alliance’s cooperative, collaborative approach, and teachers have adapted the school’s restorative justice model, to which Owen credits the school’s low suspension rate. And Alliance students and staff regularly travel to other schools to help educators learn how to implement the approach. “If we can prove that these practices haven’t become institutionalized in most places,” Owen says. “These are practices all students benefit from, not just gay students.”

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Third-grader Jaime of Denver, Colorado, was having a hard time concentrating in school. The son of Mexican immigrants, he had learned to speak English perfectly in his dual-language public school, but reading and writing was another story.

“The teaching method wasn’t working for him,” said Jaime’s mother, Xochitl Rico. She was anxious to change schools, but, due to the economy, could not afford to spend extra money on the English tutoring he would need.

“I had to choose between paying for health insurance and tutoring,” Rico said.

A friend told her about Cesar Chavez Academy, a new tuition-free charter school where the majority of students are of Hispanic origin. She enrolled Jaime in the fourth-grade class and his younger brother into the first grade. Within months, she said, the difference was “amazing, something like magic.”

“I was surprised. They are motivated and want to be number one in the class. My oldest is writing and reading in English. It was everything I was looking for,” Rico said.

Stories like Rico’s are becoming increasingly common as parents of English language learners, or ELLs, are turning to charter schools to provide their children with a school experience that meets their academic needs and honors their cultural heritage. And as more immigrant parents seek alternatives, charter schools are becoming increasingly focused on serving specific immigrant populations. For example:

At Twin Cities International Charter School, founded by East African immigrants, school lunches meet Islamic dietary requirements, girls can wear headscarves without being teased, and officials are trained to help students who have grown up in refugee camps.

At Hebrew Language Academy Charter School in Brooklyn, immigrant students from Russia and Israel can learn subjects such as art, music and social studies in a dual-language, Hebrew/English environment.

Immigrant parents often praise these schools for providing a sensitive transition to English language proficiency. In a country where students of color succumb to an “achievement gap” and ELLs are often underserved, the hopeful image of immigrant students in friendly schools has drawn national media attention.

But even if immigrant-focused charter schools are indeed “something like magic,” some educators worry the
“We wanted kids to know that their own communities and families have valuable knowledge that can and should be shared.”

Principal Deborah Wei wants a diverse school, a multi-racial school where immigrant and non-immigrant students can be in class with educators who care about them and are skilled, but in integrated schools, you don’t necessarily have people with skills to meet the needs of immigrant students,” said Noguera.

Clearly, parents want charter schools appealing. Many engage parents in their native language and focus on the children’s English language development with customized teaching methods. Educators at these schools are better equipped to address special circumstances experienced by immigrant families, such as refugee trauma. And the students seem to thrive.

Noguera said he has seen “a lot of really good public schools that are segregated. But we have to be concerned about segregating the schools because these students don’t get the same kind of exposure as they would in an integrated setting. Immigrant kids learn from being on the playground and being around kids who speak English,” he said. “Segregation is not in their best interest.”

Reconnecting the Generations

Principal Deborah Wei wants a diverse school, a multi-racial school where immigrant and non-immigrant students can excel. But in many ways, her school is a perfect example of the advantages of immigrant-focused charters.

The Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School, or FACT, was born out of years of parent dissatisfaction with the outcomes of Asian American students in Philadelphia. There was no school in the city’s Chinatown, and none on the construction schedule for a number of years. Things were so bad for the growing number of immigrant Asian American students that the nonprofit group Asian Americans United (AAU) filed a lawsuit requesting equal access to district schools, as well as other reforms.

Some reforms were instituted, but AAU eventually decided to take matters into its own hands. The group partnered with The Folklore Project to create FACT, the first publicly funded school in Chinatown North.

“We wanted to serve immigrant children and families in a way that honors their culture and provides education,” said Wei, principal and CEO of FACT. “And we wanted a multi-racial diverse school, not just Chinese and not just immigrant.”

The school brings in artists, storytellers, dancers and musicians who are experts in their field but who also are recognized in their own communities. Artists who come to the school must meet a set of folk standards, similar to standards used for other subjects such as English and math. For Wei, it is a stark contrast to what might be called “international day” at a traditional public school where students are asked to dress in costume and eat ethnic food.

“We wanted kids to know that their own communities and families have valuable knowledge that can and should be shared,” said Wei, principal and CEO of FACT. “We felt it was particularly important because of the disconnect between generations. It’s really exhilarating in immigrant communities because of the marginalization of immigrant culture as the kids turn American. Parents are watching their kids grow apart from them, and we wanted to interrupt that.”

Wei and her colleagues engage in a 45-minute community building session each morning to create the kind of climate that allows all students to feel comfortable and supported.

“It takes a lot of work,” Wei said. Her multilingual staff translates all written material into four other languages besides English, and the school subscribes to a telephonic transcription service that helps teachers talk to parents with the help of a translator.

Wei said she’d like to see more racial diversity in the school, where black, Latino and white students make up 29 percent of the population, but diversifying has been a challenge. Outreach, she said, is something charter schools don’t do well enough.

Do They Work?

While immigrant-focused charters have generated lots of positive buzz from parents and the press, the jury is still out on their effectiveness. Many of these schools are relatively new, and data is scarce.

In 2009, Stanford University’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) released a report on the effectiveness of charter schools. The study looked at all charters — not just charters with an ethnic focus.

The study indicated that charter school students were not faring as well as students in traditional public schools. However, there were some notable exceptions. According to the CREDO report, high-stakes learners performed significantly better in charter schools.

It’s hard to say why. Perhaps it is the individualized attention; charter schools are often smaller than traditional public schools, with lower levels of bureaucracy. Students seem to feel empowered in schools where they can share their cultural knowledge.

Some say that even when charter schools do work better for ELLs, the public shouldn’t think of them as a “magic bullet.” Because there just aren’t enough charter slots to go around, in some districts, ELLs often aren’t getting the slots that do exist.

“ELL students in particular get the short end of the stick when it comes to charter schools,” said Noel Anderson, an associate professor of political science at Brooklyn College. “Because admission is determined by lottery, often there is an information void about how to apply to the school. It is a highly competitive process.”

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Clearly, parents are compelled to consider that tradeoff.

Urban sociologist Pedro Noguera of New York University describes how parents are compelled to consider that tradeoff.

“You want students to be in class with educators who care about them and are skilled, but in integrated schools, you don’t necessarily have people with skills to meet the needs of immigrant students,” said Noguera.

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Clearly, parents find the charter schools appealing. Many experts say it’s unlikely that there will ever be enough of these schools to serve every ELL student. Here are a few common charter school themes that might work well in your own school.

Language immersion — Students are immersed in a new language for part of the day. Dan Gerstein, a spokesperson for Hebrew Language Academy, said parents embrace the opportunity for their children to learn a second language. “Some parents, for example, Israeli and Russian immigrants, really want their children to learn Hebrew,” he said.

Cultural exchange — Students share knowledge from their home cultures — which helps them stay in touch with their home cultures. “At FACT they would always tell me to keep up with my home language,” said Matrina Liem, originally from Indonesia. “They said that just because I’m learning English doesn’t mean I have to speak it all the time. Sometimes I thought if I went to another school, there might not be anyone telling me that.”

Individualized learning plans — School officials collect data to identify and assess the needs of each student, devising an individualized learning plan. “There is a high emphasis on strategies to teach ELL students,” said Randall Eckart, director of Twin Cities International in Minnesota.

Community building — Teachers create a warm and inclusive environment. “In a charter school we can build the type of climate that we want to have,” said principal Deborah Wei, who created “lunch families” at her school. “The older kids eat lunch with the younger kids, and they really learn how to take care of the younger ones.”

Cultural competency — Teachers respect and honor the cultures represented in ELL classrooms. “We don’t look at ELL as a barrier. We look at it as an advantage. Every one of our children speak two languages, some speak three languages, some speak four,” said Twin Cities’ Eckart.

Parents and grandparents are engaged — Teachers respect and honor the wisdom of their elders. Students at FACT “come from cultures where seniors are in the prime of their life,” said Wei, who hires local elders to spend time with students, sharing oral histories and cultural traditions.

But she wouldn’t trade her sons’ school for anything. “I want my children to have good opportunities in this country so they can go to college like everybody else,” she said.

CAMILLE JACKSON is a former writer for Teaching Tolerance and now works as a communications specialist at Duke University. She also has worked as a staff reporter for the New Haven Advocate in Connecticut and holds a master of science degree in journalism from Quinnipiac University.
Check the Labels

A simple writing assignment sharpens students’ minds — and challenges their biases.
“If you are describing any occurrence, or a man, make two or more distinct reports at different times. Though you may think you have said all, you will to-morrow remember a whole new class of facts which perhaps interested most of all at the time, but did not present themselves to be reported.”

— HENRY DAVID THOREAU, JOURNALS

“Oh, come on,” says Daniel, who did write it. “You know what I mean ...” He’s smiling. “I know you do. We all do.”

“I do — but I don’t want to! I don’t need or want my stereotypes confirmed. I want knowledge.”

“How?” says Prita. “How am I supposed to know the person’s Chinese?”

“Right,” says Daniel. “How am I supposed to describe him, then?”

“Yes, describe him — don’t label him.”

“I said he was Chinese, but I didn’t say he wasn’t American.”

“I laugh and nod. “But if you were describing me, would you say — maybe after ‘old guy,’ ‘professor-type,’ ‘tall man with gray hair in green plaid shirt’ — would you say, ‘American’ or ‘Brazilian’ or ‘Brazilian American’?”

“I didn’t know you were Brazilian,” says Iovonne.

“I didn’t know I was either. I’m not.”

The class laughs.

“I got this program — it goes through my photos on my computer and it finds faces and it labels them: ‘Grandma,’ ‘Grandma,’ ‘Girlfriend,’ ‘Ex-girlfriend,’ ‘Ex-boyfriend,’ ‘Brother,’ ‘Me,’ ‘Me,’ and my favorite, ‘Me’...”

“It does!” says Harvey. “I got this program — it goes around in my photos on my computer and it finds faces and it labels them: ‘Grandma,’ ‘Grandma,’ ‘Girlfriend,’ ‘Ex-Girlfriend,’ ‘Brother,’ ‘Me,’ ‘Me,’ and my favorite, ‘Me’...”

“Right,” says Daniel. “How am I supposed to describe him, then?”

“How do you show his American?”

“I’m not even going to say — maybe after ‘old guy,’ ‘professor-type,’ ‘tall man with gray hair in green plaid shirt’ — would you say, ‘American’ or ‘Brazilian’ or ‘Brazilian American’?”

“So from the observations, when Nicole writes she saw ‘this Dominican guy,’ I can say (or write in the margin), ‘He looks Dominican!’”

“Harvey is in the mood for participation. Smiling, he says: ‘Knowledge?’ says Prita. ‘How am I supposed to know the person’s ethnic background, we have to work really hard and know an awful lot about the person and their background. So from the observations, when Nicole writes she saw ‘this Dominican guy,’ I can say (or write in the margin), ‘He looks Dominican!’”

Nicole laughs. “Professor, I know because I’m Dominican!”

“I’m not even going to try to describe anybody by race, by nationality, by nothing,” says Iovonne. “Everyone will just be male or female, young or old, tall or short.”

“Because America is prejudiced,” says Harvey, who doesn’t usually talk in class. “Because in America, face it — yeah, face it, if your face isn’t white, then you’re not American. If people are generous, it’s like you get to be a half-American.”

“I see a Chinese guy”

This is very troubling. We all sink into these prejudices. I often feel sunk myself by them. The only way out that I have found, the only way to overcome it, is to stick with what I like to call “Art.” Others might call my approach “Objective Observations.” If my students want to distinguish between people of different ethnic backgrounds, I want them to create something to show the difference.

And then, if readers can’t distinguish what somebody is, our sighing resignation doesn’t seem so bad. We accept that we don’t have enough information to know.

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“Yeah. But usually it’s not my fault, like because their mom’s Puerto Rican and their pops is Dominican. Or they’re Dominican, but they grew up white — sorry, professor! — around a lot of... pale-skinned people” — the class laughs — “and it’s hard to see the D.R. in them.”

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48 teaching tolerance spring 2010 spring 2010 teaching tolerance

Marcella so delighted me because just as she described

Mohammed, ventured into Prospect Park for only the sec-

ond or third time in her several years living close by to it. Then I heard her say something to her daughter in Russian.”

“But you didn’t write that down.”

“There’s so much to write down. So much things!”

Yes, the world is full of details. This assignment brings out

what students of all levels can do. They describe as well as

they can, with their own everyday words. Nouns and verbs

naturally take precedence — and the adjectives and adverbs

require facts rather than judgments. How happy I am that

for an hour or two we are overwhelmed not by electronic

overload but by sitting on a bench and trying to notice all

the details of the world right there in front of us!

For the research project, I send them out into pub-

lic spaces to observe. The rules are the same as we had on

campus, except this time, the observation is for an hour. We

discuss what “public space” means: no one can be excluded

from that space (we argue about whether or not the public

library is a public space, and we decide it is) except when

one person is in that space (in parks in my city, for example, have “closing” times even when they don’t have gates). Is a private space that “everyone” uses okay? I usually try to dissuade

my students from the subway, because besides needing the

time to get in, my students sometimes get suspiciously ob-

served themselves there, and I don’t like putting them into

uncomfortable situations.

This project is the most effective way I’ve found for stu-

dents to finally get out into their own neighborhoods — into

public parks, onto city benches — or to relearn and appreci-

ate bits they used to know. Some are frightened about doing

so, and I suggest to them that they bring a companion. (Later,

we discuss how the companion affects the way the observer

herself is seen.)

One of my favorite students of the last few years, Marcella

Mohammed, ventured into Prospect Park for only the sec-

ond or third time in her several years living close by to it. Marcella so delighted me because just as she described the Prospect Park trees and their colors, the yellows, tans, browns, oranges, she also described the skin of the people she saw. We were trees, or the trees were people. Anyway, there we all were, growing and alive.

After this hour’s work I read off the observations and make

lots of marginal comments, bracketing off their unhelpful opinion words (fat, ugly, beautiful, tall, nerdy).

I ask my students to write about what the people walking

by would have noticed about them. What were they wear-

ing? (Marcella accounted for this too; her own hijab and

those of her daughters were as natural and matter-of-fact

as the leaves and bark on the trees, as the baseball caps on

the heads of young and old walkers.)

Then I send them back to that very same spot — they

must stick to the same spot, just as surely as landscape art-

ists — for another hour. I don’t tell them that they might get

bored this time. I tell them to do it again, but perhaps at an-

other time or day of the week, and I ask for more details to

clear up evaluatory vaguenesses in their earlier report (“a lot,” “really smelly,” “hardly any,” “always jumping around”).

The landscape is different the second time around. Trees

have sprouted more leaves. The weather has changed! A scaf-

dolding has gone up. The dog-walkers appear. The after-school

children take over the previously desolate playground.

The focus usually narrows in the second observation.

From the previous hour, when they noticed “a lot of garbage
cans,” this time they count them: “There are 19 green bar-

rel garbage cans between the playground and the handball
courts, 12 on the east end of the park and seven elsewhere.”

They know something! “There are 16 children — no, 17! —

and four nannies (yes, I know, professor, ‘opinion word”) —

all I’m saying is the women are much darker in skin-tone

than the children they’re minding!” (This, I point out to

Marie, would be a good point to research in periodicals.

How many nannies are there in Park Slope? What are the demog-

raphics of nannyness in New York City?)

The students’ final research projects involve not only

reading about the area and returning to their spot to confirm

or clarify details, but interviewing residents of the neighbor-

hoods surrounding the sites they wrote about: Marine Park,

Crown Heights, College Point, Roosevelt Island, Brighton

Beach, the East Village. I want my students to have their

own experiences through which to filter the observations,

rather than the other way around. I want my students to

see and know something, to trust their curiosity to be their

guide to further research. I want them to be informed writers,

to be Thoreaus rather than retailers of processed impres-

sions and information.

They know something under their noses that always

was known — but probably no one else in the

neighborhood knows either. There is plenty of research ma-

terial, mountains of paper and jillions of gigabytes, on New

York City neighborhoods, but to my great satisfaction, my

students discover that not everything out there is “known,”

that in fact they themselves have recorded previously un-

documented details. They learn that whatever they find in

an article or book had its origins in some particular person

having gone out and looked at and listened to and taken in

the world with her senses.
Olivia Contreras remembers being afraid. As an eighth-grade student at Jackson Middle School in Nashville, Tennessee, Olivia had arrived in the United States from her native Nicaragua the previous year. All of her academic experiences in the seventh grade had been in an English language learner (ELL) program. There, the teacher taught at a level slightly above that which was easily comprehensible to students, using demonstrations, pictures, diagrams, graphic organizers and hands-on materials to help students understand.

But Olivia learned English so quickly that she was placed in mainstream content classes the following year. Texts and materials in these classes were at grade level, and the expectations and requirements were the same for all learners.

“Science was the most difficult for me,” recalls Olivia. “I usually understood the information from labs, but I had difficulty reading the book and I couldn’t explain what I did.”

What’s more, NCLB allows students to get credit toward graduation only for classes taught by “highly qualified” teachers endorsed in their subject areas. By moving students toward grade-level classes, teachers are helping them stay on track to graduate.

Still, this very distinction has effectively reduced or eliminated many transitional subject-area classes taught by ELL-endorsed teachers. The effects of this trend can now be seen in middle and elementary schools, where students are often placed in grade-level classes with ELL teacher assistance but with little or no opportunities for students to be pulled out into their own classes for specialized instruction.

And rapid mainstreaming seems to ignore what the research tells us: It takes five to seven or more years for students to pick up the academic language needed to survive in grade-level classes.

No matter how we feel about the trend toward mainstreaming, it is happening. If English learners are to be mainstreamed into grade-level classrooms, we must look at the ways in which grade-level teachers can be taught basic second language acquisition theory and research. We must give teachers the tools to incorporate effective and essential strategies and techniques into lessons so that English learners are not simply sitting alongside native English-speaking peers, but learning alongside them as well.

In this way, we all take “ownership” of students, and everyone can become a language teacher.

An Effective Tool
At Claremont Immersion Elementary School in Arlington, Virginia, where one-third of the students are English learners, I am responsible for the professional development of a staff of 50 grade-level teachers, specialists and special education teachers in grades Pre-K through 6.

Our professional development is centered on the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, or SIOP, which has been proven to be an effective tool for improving ELL student learning.

### The Components of ELL Instruction

1. **Lesson Preparation**
   - Clearly define content objectives
   - Clearly define language objectives
   - Select content concepts that are appropriate to learners’ age and educational background
   - Use a variety of supplementary materials to make the lesson clear and meaningful (computer programs, graphs, models, visuals)
   - Adapt the content to all proficiency levels
   - Use authentic and meaningful activities and integrate them into lesson concepts

2. **Building Background**
   - Explicitly link concepts to students’ background experiences
   - Emphasize key vocabulary
   - Use activities to promote higher-order thinking skills

3. **Comprehensible Input**
   - Use speech that is appropriate for students’ proficiency level
   - Clearly explain academic tasks
   - Use a variety of techniques to make content clear (model, use visuals, demonstrations and hands-on activities)

4. **Learning Strategies**
   - Provide ample opportunities for students to use strategies
   - Consistently use scaffolding techniques throughout the lesson
   - Include a variety of question types that promote higher-order thinking skills

5. **Interaction**
   - Provide students with frequent opportunities for interaction and discussion between teacher and student and among students and encourage extended student discourse about the lesson concepts
   - Carefully configure the grouping of students to support language and content of the lesson
   - Consistently provide sufficient wait time for student responses
   - Provide ample opportunities for students to clarify key concepts in their native language

6. **Practice and Application**
   - Provide hands-on materials and/or manipulatives for students to practice using new content knowledge
   - Provide activities for students to apply content and language knowledge in the classroom
   - Use activities that integrate all language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking)

7. **Lesson Delivery**
   - Clearly support the content objectives in lesson delivery
   - Clearly support the language objectives in lesson delivery

8. **Review and Assessment**
   - Include a comprehensive review of key vocabulary
   - Include a comprehensive review of key content concepts
   - Provide regular feedback to students on their output
   - Conduct assessments of student comprehension and learning of all lesson objectives throughout the lesson

**SOURCE**: www.ca.org/soon

### Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)

- **Provide students with frequent opportunities for interaction and discussion between teacher and student and among students.**
- **Encourage extended student discourse about the lesson concepts.**
- **Maintain a consistent use of scaffolding techniques throughout the lesson.**
- **Include a variety of question types that promote higher-order thinking skills.**
- **Provide ample opportunities for students to clarify key concepts in their native language.**

**SIOP** is an effective tool for improving ELL student learning.
SIOP organizes 30 features of good lessons for English learners into eight overarching components. In the training, teachers learn how to incorporate those features into their lessons and units of instruction from practical examples. Some of the ideas in SIOP (see sidebar, or visit www.cal.org/siop) may seem obvious. Some may take you by surprise. All the lesson features suggested in SIOP are backed by research and arranged in a framework that helps teachers stay focused on what works. The strategies identified in SIOP are crucial for English learners and may prove to be beneficial other learners as well.

SIOP uses a peer coaching approach. Teachers are encouraged to pair up with a colleague and use a checklist of the 30 features to evaluate each other’s instruction in a systematic and non-threatening way. As someone who has been a classroom teacher, a program administrator and assistant professor in a master’s degree program for ELL teachers, I find that I am always excited to implement SIOP and work alongside teachers — because I always learn something I didn’t know.

The term “sheltered” refers to the means for making academic content comprehensible to English learners while they develop English proficiency. Classrooms with sheltered instruction teaching methods may be used in self-contained ELL classes or in grade-level classes that contain both English speakers and English learners. SIOP is currently being implemented in schools and school systems throughout the United States, including Kansas City, Missouri, where every teacher in this Midwestern urban district of 27,000 students and 4,000 teachers is trained in the SIOP model.

In preparing to write this article, I surveyed grade-level teachers, special education teachers, reading specialists and ELL teachers in both elementary and secondary schools. I asked them what they believe are the most important considerations for instruction of English learners, particularly given the trend that these students be placed in grade-level classes soon after achieving basic levels of English language acquisition.

Most teachers agreed that primary instructional issues are covered by the SIOP model. But they also identified a few additional issues that educators should be thinking about. These include:

**Community:** In order for students to work together and learn from each other, we have to create unity in a school and classroom.

“When integrating your community is not as simple as putting your kids together in a class. What is it to truly build community in your classroom?” asks Joseph Provisor, a former ELL teacher with the Los Angeles Unified School District and director of the Council Project, which teaches students and teachers to tell their stories in the classroom.

“Teachers and students need tools to make the classroom a beneficial learning place for all,” Provisor says. “When you have kids from Vietnam, from El Salvador and from Azerbaijan, you have an extraordinary opportunity to expand your world view by truly integrating these folks in your classroom. What makes America? That’s a challenge.”

**Time:** Pacing guides, state tests and the pressure to make adequate yearly progress all force teachers to push through curriculum at a pace that is not appropriate for English learners who are learning the language as well as the content.

One grade-level middle school science teacher I spoke with said, “When I teach science, I cruise. I always get through all of the curriculum by the end of the school year.” But at what cost? When the pace is accelerated so that students are taught the declarative knowledge that is commonly required for success on state tests, they miss out on opportunities to probe deeply into concepts and explore higher-order thinking. This is especially unfortunate for English learners who need opportunities to use the new language and concepts in a variety of ways over time.

**Differentiating Instruction:** Teachers need to know how to differentiate instruction within a classroom. As budget cuts further increase class sizes, some teachers are faced with teaching 25 to 30 or more students per classroom and five to six preparations a day. Teachers benefit from training and specific guidelines as to how to plan and teach for different ability levels within one class.

**Team-teaching:** Putting two teachers together does not necessarily mean that they will function as a team. Team-teaching between ELL teachers and grade-level classroom teachers can work well, but teachers need to have mutual respect for each other, clearly defined roles and opportunities for shared planning.

Susan Connors, a 30-year veteran ELL teacher at Taylor Elementary School in Arlington, Virginia, uses what she calls a “tag team” approach with her grade-level teachers. Susan and the grade-level teacher take turns leading instruction within a lesson. Susan’s focus is on extension activities that promote language development that work with all children in the room. “If we expect our grade-level teachers to be English language teachers, then we have to be grade-level teachers as well. It’s reciprocal.”

When I asked my principal, Cintia Johnson, why she believed in a mainstreaming approach to teaching English learners, she responded, “In my view, including students in grade-level classes with English-speaking peers, we capitalize on the strengths and abilities these students bring to the learning experience. We raise the bar by having high expectations for all learners. My desire is for us to recognize the true abilities on the high end of what a child can do and not focus on their weaknesses. Training all of the staff in strategies to understand the needs of these children and know how to teach them is the key.”

When teachers struggle with their own understandings of diversity — and consciousness of their own racial, ethnic and class identities and how these identities affect their teaching. While white students are often confronting these identities seriously for the first time when they reach our classroom, this is work that all teachers need to do in order to reach their students effectively.

With few exceptions, the process of becoming competent in multicultural discourse is advanced by an initial event or “encounter” that challenges individuals to reconsider their identities and how these identities affect their teaching. Multicultural understanding and proficiency have never been more important to teachers than they are right now. Never before have we had so many young children entering schools populated by teachers who reflect neither their race, nor their language tradition, nor the communities from which they come. This growth in culturally diverse classrooms has unfortunately coincided with an “achievement gap” of historical proportions.

In our work as teacher educators over the years, we have carefully watched and listened to pre-service and practicing teachers struggle with their own understandings of diversity — and consciousness of their own racial, ethnic and class identities and how these identities affect their teaching. While white students are often confronting these identities seriously for the first time when they reach our classroom, this is work that all teachers need to do in order to reach their students effectively.

‘I Don’t Think I’m Biased’

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In our work as teacher educators over the years, we have carefully watched and listened to pre-service and practicing teachers confront their attitudes about race and privilege.
beliefs and attitudes. The encounter, according to Gay, is “an experience or event that shatters a person’s current feelings... It may be real or vicarious, personal or social, verbal or visual.” The design and provision of such encounters is a decisive component of our diversity work. While some of the most powerful encounter experiences involve immersion in a different culture, these experiences are not always available or accessible. Because of this, we have worked to identify encounter experiences that can occur within the walls of our university classrooms or schools — and have found that many of these encounters can elicit similar outcomes.

The Teaching Diverse Students Initiative (TDIS), now available at www.tolerance.org/tdsi, includes a number of resources to help create such an experience. The section on “Understanding the Influence of Race” includes tools to help teachers examine their own biases and think critically about what “race” really means.

Another encounter experience that we use can be found at the website for the Public Broadcasting Service television series “Race: The Power of an Illusion” (www.pbs.org/race).

The “Sorting People” exercise asks participants to categorize individuals into racial/ethnic groups based solely on their visual appearance. Participants’ error scores ease the transition into a dialogue about race as a social construct. The website provides support materials and other experiences to help students further explore this content.

We have also used many of the tools mentioned above to create opportunities for teachers to examine beliefs, attitudes and biases. One of the most powerful readings for our predominantly white, female students is Peggy McIntosh’s 1999 article, White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack. Most of these students are un- aware of the privileges they receive just by being born white in the United States and are startled to read this article. We often find that many of these students can provide a roadblock to productive dialogue and reflection. To address this response, we encourage teachers to consider how they were socialized as children. Many are quick to report that individuals in their family had racist attitudes, which they actively reject, but which may have played a part in the associations that are part of their subconscious. At this point, we share excerpts from films such as Mickey Mouse Monopoly (Sun, 2001), which examines how the “other” is portrayed in Disney films. In addition, we show the short documentary A Girl Like Me (Davis, 2006), where young African American girls recount their issues with race, and repeat the historic experiment asking children to choose the doll they want for a friend. As teachers watch young African American children consistently select the white doll, their eyes are opened to considering how such associations develop.

When teachers read articles about white privilege, we find that many accept privilege and bias as realities in their lives. We have found that the process of addressing personal bias isn’t about reaching a destination. According to B.J. Cahill and E.M. Adams, “No one ever arrives; they just bring more stuff.” As we present pre-service and practicing teachers with the exploration of education for social justice, this work is not achieved without challenge. As we present pre-service and practicing teachers with new ideology and experience, we also must acknowledge that they are dealing with a reality that is not conscious. In our society, we can easily make this proclamation. The consequences of slavery and colonialism are decidedly visible in our society, and individuals’ experiences with racism are real and must be validated. Teachers often confront the reality of racism, their awareness is critical in making conscious decisions about themselves, others and their role in affecting change.

CONCLUSION

As teacher educators, we continue to challenge ourselves to provide varied opportunities for teachers to engage in the exploration of education for social justice. This work is not achieved without challenge. As we present pre-service and practicing teachers with new ideology and experience, we also must acknowledge that they are dealing with a reality that is not conscious. In our society, we can easily make this proclamation. The consequences of slavery and colonialism are decidedly visible in our society, and individuals’ experiences with racism are real and must be validated. Teachers often confront the reality of racism, their awareness is critical in making conscious decisions about themselves, others and their role in affecting change.

For a full list of the research and resources referenced in this article, read the online version at www.tolerance.org
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Examining classroom organization and management from a cultural perspective, Managing Diverse Classrooms: How to Build on Students’ Cultural Strengths, by Carrie Rothstein-Fisch and Elise Trumbull, presents a practical “how to” for building on students’ cultural strengths. Drawing from the theoretical framework developed through the Bridging Cultures Project, this book fosters greater understanding and respect for relationships with families and students in culturally relevant and valued ways.

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In Dear Paulo: Letters from Those Who Dare Teach, edited by Sonia Nieto, dozens of teachers write deeply personal letters addressed to famed Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. The result is a book that has much of the fire and magic of Freire’s own writings.

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Despite its title, Lynn Ziegler’s SPONGEHEADZ is not just another book that tells us how frightened we should be about our kids consuming television. Instead, it’s a hands-on guide for teaching kids to think about what they see on TV (and what’s behind what they see), as well as a guide for teaching kids to talk back to the media. The book is built around the metaphor of a remote control — to help you remember who has the POWER and to look for the BALANCE.

ISBN# 978-0-8715-9762-1
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The Children in Room E4: American Education on Trial, by Susan Eaton, weaves together two stories. One is the tale of the long legal battle around racial segregation in urban classrooms. The other is an intimate narrative of a teacher and her students’ struggle for social justice. That’s the underlying theme of Designing Socially Just Learning Communities, edited by Rebecca Rogers, Melissa Mosley and Mary Ann Kramer. The book includes more than a dozen essays by teachers who helped their students discuss close-to-home issues — like real estate “redlining,” sexual assault and war — and found that their students came away as stronger critics of their teachers’ initial skepticism.

ISBN# 978-0-8077-4991-5
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It’s popular these days to deride textbooks as ineffective classroom tools. In Teaching What Really Happened: How to Avoid the Tyranny of Textbooks and Get Students Excited About Doing History, James Loewen reminds us why the textbook should go. Loewen debunks major myths supported by most history texts and offers examples of how students learn more by doing historiography — that is, by studying how history was written and why it was written that way.

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“Starting Small expanded my vision and philosophy and radically changed what I did in the classroom. Now, as an administrator, I’m providing the kit to staff so they may benefit as well.”

— P.B., Washington

Return the order card on this page, or visit us at www.teachingtolerance.org/resources for an order form.
In That’s Like Me: Stories About Amazing People with Learning Differences, Joan Suyenaga collects some of the moving stories of children who have been the source of her fascination all her life. Now she takes on the hardest task: telling the story of genocide in Cambodia. Half Spoon of Rice takes an unflinching look at a story that needs to be told. Not a light read, this book could be a centerpiece for any well-thought-out unit on genocide.

Children’s author Icy Smith has long been a chronicler of Asian American communities. Now she takes on her hardest task: telling the story of genocide in Cambodia. Half Spoon of Rice takes an unflinching look at a story that needs to be told. Not a light read, this book could be a centerpiece for any well-thought-out unit on genocide.

Students will enjoy figuring out the secrets behind the tricks. (Grades 3-5)


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Tens of millions of kids can’t be wrong. In Indonesian Children’s Favorite Stories, author Joan Suyenaga collects some of the most-loved children’s stories from one of the world’s most populous countries. Trickster heroes figure largely in these eight stories: children will enjoy figuring out the secrets behind the tricks. (Grades 3-5)


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Margaret Read MacDonald’s Surf War tells the story of a whale and a sandpiper who each claim to own the ocean. When they both call in their cousins and attack each other, they quickly learn that the ocean is for everyone. Based on a Micronesian legend, this story offers a fresh look at the causes of fights on playgrounds or anywhere. (Grades K-5)


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I’m not moving from this tuffet,” declares Ms. Muffet on one of the pages of The Girls Are Not Chicks Coloring Book by Jacinta Bunnell and Julie Novak. The book includes 27 coloring pages that promote active, powerful images of girlhood. Some of the pages include vocabulary that isn’t at an early-grade level, but you can explain what “assertiveness” and “patriarchy” mean while coloring with your students. (Grades PreK-6)

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Emma Tenayuca learned about equity as a very young girl, and as a young adult led a labor movement for the pecan shellers of Texas in the 1930s and 1950s. That’s Not Fair! Emma Tenayuca: Struggle for Justice/no Es Justo! La lucha de Emma Tenayuca por la justicia, by Carmen Tafolla, shares her story with a new generation of young readers. (Grades 4-6)

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“Your longings for affiliation has been the source of my creativity,” said the artist Isamu Noguchi. As a biracial child, Noguchi was often shunned during his childhood in Japan. The East-West House, written and illustrated by Cristy Hale, tells how the young Noguchi designed a house for his mother, belonging to both Eastern and Western design. A great way to introduce both cultural identities and different artistic traditions to young students.

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Common in African American communities during the Great Depression, “rent parties” began as a way to help people in need get rent money before landlords threw them out. Over time they evolved, shaping the development of jazz and labor movements. Rent Party, by William Miller, follows one young man as he organizes a rent party to help his struggling mother in 1930s New Orleans. (Grades 1-3)


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MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL

Paired with evocative photographs, Transforming Lives: Turning Uganda’s Forgotten Children Into Leaders, by Stephen Kyesseck, shows the struggles of the central African country through personal narratives of former child soldiers, children in refugee camps, and kids affected by AIDS and poverty. For kids who are turned off by large blocks of text, this book could still be a page-turner—and a call to action. (Grades 7-12)


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Blue Mountain Trouble, by Martin Mordecai, tells the story of a 12-year-old twins Polly and Jackson. When a bully comes to their town and begins harassing their family, the twins need all of their wits to keep their family safe. This story is set in the blue mountain region of Jamaica, where the author grew up. (Grades 7-9)

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By the time Jessenia was 14, she had been the subject of a series of rapes, including by her brother who had a DAD. His symptoms of schizophrenia. (Grades 7-12)


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Brian Schaverin, a working class mixed-race child in rural Texas—while dealing with symptoms of schizophrenia. (Grades 7-12)


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Nothing Pink, by Mark Hardy, is about a teenage named Vincent who moves with his family to a new town. Vincent’s father is the local pastor. Vincent is gay. Can Vincent recon- cile his sexual orientation and his religious identity? (Grades 7-12) ISBN: 978-1-9318-9646-9 Curborne Press (800) 423-5110 www.curborne.org

Growing up in Hong Kong in the 1960s, Ching Yeung Russell struggled with her gender identity — but her mother always said, “girls and boys are just the same.” In the poetry col- lection Tefi Quilt, Russell paints a loving portrait of the family that supported her dream of becoming a writer. ISBN: 978-1-4129-7506-3 Corwin Press (800) 851-6640 www.corwinpress.com

“Being in Auschwitz was like being in a car accident every single day,” writes Holocaust survivor Eva Mozes Kor. Surviving the Angel of Death: The Story of a Mengele Twin in Auschwitz gives a first-hand account of her experience in a Nazi death camp — and her controversial decision to publicly forgive her tormentor. Eva Mozes Kor and co-author Lisa Ropoly Buchanan have a gift for breaking down the horrors of the Holocaust into language that young people can relate to and understand. ISBN: 978-1-9337-1828-6 Tanglewood Books (800) 836-4994 www.tanglewoodbooks.com

A Young People’s History of the United States, by Howard Zinn, is a middle- school version of Zinn’s progressive classic. The book not only seeks to set the record straight for children, it also highlights children who have influ- enced history (Grades 7-12) ISBN: 978-1-5872-2865-2 Seven Stories Press (800) 283-3572 www.sevenstories.com

Even before his school be- came the center of a famous struggle over integra- tion, football Coach Wilson Matthews taught his all-white team to re- spect people of all backgrounds. The Good Ground of Central High: Little Rock Central High School and Legendary Coach Wilson Matthews, by George M. Cate, is the per- fect book to get athletes interested in history and issues of social justice. (Grades 7-12) ISBN: 978-1-6069-3290-2 eloquentbooks.com ISBN# 978-1-6069-3290-2 www.eloquentbooks.com

In this downloadable video game, players take on the role of immigrants trying to find their way toward citizenship. In a world of complicated legal identifications affix us all — particularly in school settings. ISBN: 978-1-4129-7506-3 Corwin Press (800) 851-6640 www.corwinpress.com

Sometimes you can’t see what’s all around you until you take a step back. The Education Project is an Australian-based blog that critiques white privilege and anti-immigrant bias. Down Under — with frequent commentary on how these issues play out in the United States. It’s a dose of perspective that might help you rethink your opinions on bias and prejudice in America. Site: www.fagbug.com

Erin Davies was out as a lesbian, and someone didn’t like that. In fact, someone spray-painted anti-gay slurs on her Volkswagen Beetle. Instead of scraping the words off, she embarked on a cross-country journey talking to people about the meaning of this hate crime. Fagbug.com shares Davies’ surprisingly heartwarming story. Racial Equity Tools. Site: www.racialiteqtools.com

Want to take action on the racial equity issues in your community — but don’t know where to start? Racial Equity Tools offers many articles on how to begin a community group and work on the “low-hanging fruit” before taking on the larger challenges. Site: http://sites.google.com/site/mandatoryproject

Grumble Bluff, by Karen Bessey Pease, is the story of two teenage girls who, because they are differ- ent, are bullied at school. The novel follows the girls through middle and high school, seeing them de- fined by the choices they make in their lives. (Grades 7-12) ISBN: 978-1-6069-3290-2 eloquentbooks.com ISBN# 978-1-6069-3290-2 www.eloquentbooks.com

ProCon. Site: www.procon.org

Talking about controversial topics in the classroom can be intimidating — but it’s also a great way to teach critical thinking skills and respectful civil discourse. ProCon.org gives you a framework for discussing a wide range of controversial issues, with background information to help your students support their points. About Focus. Site: www.about.focus.org

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. For the women at About Face, 200 words is more than enough space to deconstruct some of the most disturbing sexism they’ve seen in popular culture. This site can help get your students talking back to the media — and call attention to the fact that gender- stereotyped pop culture is neither creative nor fun. iFem. Site: www.icedgame.com

Enn Davies was out as a lesbian, and someone didn’t like that. In fact, someone spray-painted anti-gay slurs on her Volkswagen Beetle. Instead of scraping the words off, she embarked on a cross-country journey talking to people about the meaning of this hate crime. Fagbug.com shares Davies’ surprisingly heartwarming story. Racial Equity Tools. Site: www.racialiteqtools.com

Want to take action on the racial equity issues in your community — but don’t know where to start? Racial Equity Tools offers many articles on how to begin a community group and work on the “low-hanging fruit” before taking on the larger problems. The site also includes assessment tools to help you measure your progress. Safe School Ambassadors Site: www.safeschoolambassadors.com Teachers want to break down the social barriers between their students — but students often feel power and belonging in their social circles. Safe School Ambassadors offers a method for erasing those barriers in your effort to create a school climate of acceptance for everyone. FWD/Forward Site: http://dyslexicstudents.com Written by women with disabilities, this blog shares their stories and inspires others to do the same in everyday life, the media and politics. Of particular interest is the “Dyslexia Word Profile” in which writers explain why commonly used words are de-powering for people with disabilities. Welcoming Schools Site: www.hrc.org/welcomingSchools From the Human Rights Campaign, a free, downloadable 95-page guide to help K-12 teachers and administrators improve their approach to family diversity, gender stereotyping and bullying.
Beyond the Barbed Wire

My name is Helen Tsuchiya. My maiden name was Tanigawa. Growing up, my family included my parents, three sisters and one brother. My parents were born in Japan but I was born in the United States. My father was a farmer, growing grapes on our family farm.

Many things changed for me on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the United States declared war on Japan. Many believed that Japanese Americans could not be trusted. Executive Order 9066 was passed, which said that Japanese Americans must be put in internment camps. This is difficult to understand because everyone in my family was a U.S. citizen.

Japanese Americans were evacuated from their homes. We had only a few weeks to prepare and we could take only a few things with us. We sold some of what we owned for very little money. My mother left family pictures and wedding photographs on the wall. She said they that they would protect our home when we are gone. She really believed we would all return to our home in California. But in one day everything was stolen — even the pictures. It broke my mother’s heart.

The internment camp was surrounded by barbed wire. For three years we lived in a 20-by-20-foot room in barracks. We had no privacy, and it was so dusty it was difficult to breathe. A Pima girl who lived nearby would come up to the fence and talk to us. She felt sorry for us confined in the camp, while we felt sorry for her, confined to the reservation.

Fifty years later I revisited the camp and met that Pima girl. She said, “My Grandfather would take me to the camp on a pony. I remember the children reaching across the barbed wire to feel the pony. Even though I was 3 years old, that experience stayed with me.” Now she’s serving her people as a nurse on the reservation.

The survivors later received $20,000 as an apology from the government. But my parents had already died — they were the ones who really deserved the apology. Before the war they owned 40 acres of farmland but lost it all because they could not make the payments while in the internment camp.

During the war my brother joined the Army to prove his loyalty. He was sent to Fort Snelling in Minnesota to learn Japanese so he could fight alongside U.S. forces in Japan. After the war he found work at an engineering company. His boss loved him like his own child. We moved to Minnesota to join him.

When you think about it, it’s my parents who really suffered. Now I want to share my story with the children so it will never happen again.

HELEN TSUCHIYA told this story to folklorist and folksinger Larry Long. Long is the creator of Elder’s Wisdom, Children’s Song, a project that brings elders into the classroom to share their stories with children, who retell the stories in song. For more information, go to www.communitycelebrationofplace.org. To learn more about Americans of Japanese ancestry who fought for the U.S. in World War II, go to www.goforbroke.org.
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— Dorothy Strickland, Education Professor, Rutgers University

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