

WINTER 2025

THE ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

ATA Magazine



ASTOUNDING AND UNSETTLING

Artificial intelligence is revolutionizing education

DIVERSITY

Recognizing socioeconomic disparities in schools

PAGE 16

IN PROFILE

Science and dogs an explosive combination for Red Deer teacher

PAGE 48

MOST MEMORABLE LESSON

Assumptions can lead to humbling experience

PAGE 56



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Winter 2025 / Vol. 105 / N2

Feature

18 Astounding and Unsettling

Outlook

- 4** Letters
- 5** From the President
Mot du président
- 7** Then and Now
- 8** Looking Abroad
- 10** Unsung Hero

Bulletin Board

- 3** Editor's Notebook
Note de la rédactrice
- 12** Wellness
- 14** Technology
- 16** Diversity
- 32** Research Insights
- 48** In Profile

Learning Commons

- 38** From the Bookshelves
- 40** Kid Lit
- 43** In Focus

Teacher to Teacher

- 47** Who's Out There
- 52** In My Humble Opinion
- 55** Teacher Hacks
- 56** Most Memorable Lesson



UNSUNG HERO

Okotoks teacher a paragon of volunteerism



RESEARCH INSIGHTS

Alberta's early-career teachers facing significant challenges



TEACHER HACKS

Advertising project taps into student creativity

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Elissa Corsi | elissa.corsi@ata.ab.ca

MANAGING EDITOR

Cory Hare | cory.hare@ata.ab.ca

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Erin Solano | erin.solano@ata.ab.ca

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Lindsay Yakimyshyn

ART DIRECTION AND DESIGN

Alexa Guse
Bianca Ho
Michael Parillas

COPY EDITOR

Sandra Bit

SECTION EDITOR

Shelley Svidal

FRENCH EDITORS

David Martin, Régine Toal

ADVERTISING

Trevor Battye Advertising Sales
trevor@tbasales.ca

The *ATA Magazine* is published three times a year and is distributed to more than 35,000 members. Articles, commentary and editorial material represent the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect ATA policy.

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The Alberta Teachers' Association
11010 142 Street Edmonton, AB T5N 2R1
Telephone: 780-447-9400
Toll Free in Alberta: 1-800-232-7208
Website: www.teachers.ab.ca

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 The *ATA Magazine* is a member of the Canadian Educational Press Association.

Canadian Publication Mail Agreement No. 40065477
Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to the Alberta Teachers' Association.

ISSN 0380-9102



Contributors



WRITER




ARTIST



PHOTOGRAPHER




MELISSA WALL
p. 20

 Melissa Wall has been teaching for 20 years, mostly in middle school settings and alternative programs. For the past seven years, she has worked as a learning support teacher, helping students by providing personalized strategies and alternate programming.




BECKI LEIPERT
p. 23

 Becki Leipert is a music specialist with the Calgary Board of Education. She creates a dynamic music

program that includes singing, movement and instrument playing.




THOMAS ROGERS
p. 26

 Thomas Rogers is assistant principal at S. Bruce Smith Junior High School in Edmonton. He is pursuing his

master's degree in educational studies, focusing on artificial intelligence and educational technology.




RACHEL WADA
pp. 10 and 11

 Rachel Wada is a Vancouver-based freelance illustrator who has

worked on six published picture books, editorial illustrations for magazines and digital media, commercial artwork for brands and marketing campaigns, and public art installations.




DARREN MALTAIS
pp. 14 and 15


 Darren Maltais is a technology integration facilitator for Black Gold School Division. He works collabora-

tively with teachers and students in over 30 schools, cocreating lessons and projects to help students learn more effectively and make curriculum come alive.


ADRIANA DEWAR
pp. 33 and 37

 Adriana Dewar is the community outreach coordinator at YouthLink. She holds a master of arts in sociology, with research centered on the intersection of police engagement with social media.


BARBARA BROWN
pp. 33 and 37

 Dr. Barbara Brown is an associate professor and associate dean of teaching and learning at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary.


CHRISTINA WHITE PROSSER
pp. 33 and 37

 Dr. Christina White Prosser is an adjunct assistant professor in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Her professional experience includes working with nonprofit organizations and over 24 years in post-secondary education.


CHRISTY THOMAS
pp. 33 and 37

 Dr. Christy Thomas is the associate dean and associate professor in the School of Education at Ambrose University and an adjunct assistant professor in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary.

TYLER SIRMAN
pp. 48–50

 Tyler Sirman is an Alberta-based photographer and videographer. His work ranges from event coverage to dynamic headshots and stunning aerial photography.

ALYSSA BILODEAU
p. 55

 Alyssa Bilodeau is a secondary teacher with a passion for arts education and a commitment to inclusivity. She works to create a classroom that fosters curiosity, individuality and thoughtful engagement.

The Alberta Teachers' Association acknowledges Treaty 6, 7 and 8 territories, the ancestral and traditional territories of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, as well as the Blackfoot Confederacy: Kainai, Piikani and Siksika, Tsuu T'ina, First Nation and Stoney Nakoda First Nation. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples whose footsteps have marked these lands for generations. We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. Our recognition of this land is an act of reconciliation and an expression of our gratitude to those on whose territory we print and distribute this publication.



PHOTO BY RYAN PARKER

Elissa Corsi

Editor-in-Chief, ATA Magazine
Rédactrice en chef de l'ATA Magazine


Human connection still tops in education

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG ASPIRING TEACHER,

I embarked on a quest for the perfect chalk holder. It was a simple tool, but for me, it symbolized the potential to make learning engaging and interactive. After finding the perfect chalk holder, I began to imagine the vibrant lessons I would deliver, filled with dynamic illustrations on the board. However, that dream, rooted in a tactile and somewhat nostalgic method of teaching, feels worlds apart from the classrooms of today.

Fast forward to the present, where technology has transformed the educational landscape in ways I could only dream of. Artificial intelligence (AI), interactive whiteboards, online learning platforms and educational apps have revolutionized how knowledge is imparted and absorbed. The chalkboard has been replaced by an electronic canvas for multimedia presentations, fostering collaboration and creativity among students.

As we navigate this technological revolution, it's essential to reflect on how technology can enhance, rather than replace, the foundational values of education. The heart of teaching remains the same: building relationships, inspiring curiosity and nurturing a love for learning. Technology is a powerful ally in this mission, offering tools that cater to diverse learning styles and enabling educators to connect with students in unprecedented ways.

In this issue's feature on artificial intelligence, we explore various facets of educational technology — its challenges, its benefits and its potential. We hope to inspire both seasoned teachers and newcomers to embrace these advancements, recognizing that, although the right tools can unlock a world of possibilities for our students, it is the relationships that we create every day that move education and the experiences of our students forward. 


En éducation, les relations humaines restent au premier plan

LORSQUE J'ÉTAIS UNE JEUNE ENSEIGNANTE EN HERBE,

je me suis lancée à la recherche du porte-craie parfait. Il s'agissait d'un outil tout simple, mais à mes yeux, il symbolisait la possibilité de faire de l'apprentissage quelque chose de captivant et d'interactif. Une fois le porte-craie parfait déniché, je me suis mise à imaginer les leçons stimulantes que j'allais donner, agrémentées d'illustrations dynamiques au tableau. Toutefois, ce rêve, ancré dans une pratique de l'enseignement axée sur l'aspect tactile et quelque peu nostalgique, me semble aux antipodes des salles de classe d'aujourd'hui.

Transportons-nous au présent : la technologie a transformé le paysage éducatif d'une manière dont je ne pouvais que rêver. L'intelligence artificielle (IA), les tableaux blancs interactifs, les plateformes d'apprentissage en ligne et les applications éducatives ont révolutionné la façon dont les connaissances sont transmises et acquises. Le tableau noir a été remplacé par une toile électronique servant à faire des présentations multimédias, ce qui favorise la collaboration et la créativité entre élèves.

Alors que nous sommes entraînés dans cette révolution technologique, il est essentiel de réfléchir aux façons dont la technologie peut rehausser, plutôt que remplacer, les valeurs fondamentales de l'éducation. Nouer des relations, inspirer la curiosité et cultiver l'amour de l'apprentissage : tout cela reste au cœur de l'enseignement. La technologie est un allié de taille dans cette mission, car elle nous offre des outils adaptés aux différents styles d'apprentissage et permet aux enseignants d'entrer en relation avec les élèves d'une manière inédite.

Ce numéro propose un dossier spécial sur l'intelligence artificielle où nous explorons diverses facettes de la technologie éducative, y compris ses défis, ses avantages et son potentiel. Nous espérons inspirer à la fois les enseignants chevronnés et débutants à s'ouvrir à ces avancées, tout en reconnaissant que même si les bons outils peuvent ouvrir tout un monde de possibilités pour nos élèves, ce sont les relations que nous tissons chaque jour qui font avancer le milieu de l'éducation et enrichissent les expériences de nos élèves. 

Letters

We want your feedback

We'd like to hear from you! One of the ways we'd like to engage with teachers is by hearing from you regularly. In several locations throughout this magazine are sections calling for ideas and submissions from teachers. Please watch for these and send us your own ideas.

Also please send us

- general feedback,
- your thoughts on items that you particularly liked (or didn't),
- suggestions for future content and
- letters to the editor for possible publication.

We really do want to hear from you. After all, this is your magazine.

Email your feedback to Elissa Corsi, editor-in-chief, elissa.corsi@ata.ab.ca or Cory Hare, managing editor, cory.hare@ata.ab.ca.

GUIDELINES FOR LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Word limit: 300

Please include

- your first and last name,
- basic information about your teaching assignment (i.e. school, grade, subject).

All letters are subject to editing for length, clarity, punctuation, spelling and grammar.

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Support for gender inclusion

Re. *Those kids' are our kids: A Catholic principal and parent's perspective*, ATA Magazine, Fall 2024.

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL ARTICLE!

Support and safe learning environments for all kids, no matter their gender.

–Rachel Kaleta
Parent, Spruce Grove

THANK YOU

Thank you, with all that I am, thank you for the work, love, care, attention, consideration and support you provide.

–Haley Reigh
Parent, Foothills County

READ THE ARTICLE



Read the fall issue

The ATA Magazine is available on the ATA website. Visit teachers.ab.ca/news/we-are-here to read the fall 2024 issue.

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PHOTO BY RYAN PARKER

FROM THE PRESIDENT MOT DU PRÉSIDENT

Jason Schilling


President, ATA
Président de l'ATA

Stories are what move us forward

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT DREW ME TO teaching English and drama was the power of a truly great story. The story transports the reader or the audience to a different place and time, allowing us to experience new things, see different points of view and wonder about the past and future.

The story is a way we connect with others and it can transform lives. To witness this daily in my classroom was a privilege and a joy. The art of storytelling was also a method my students used to get me off track more than a few times in class. I always knew what they were doing and often indulged them with a tale from my youth that I would somehow spin into the day's lesson.

Teachers are natural storytellers, and I encourage my colleagues to tell the stories of their classrooms as a way to advocate for their students and public education. It is through these stories that we connect with people who may not understand what is happening in public education. Statistics can be a great source of information; however, the story that accompanies the statistics is often more powerful. It is the story that draws us in and makes us care. It is the story that shows us the heart.


We come to teaching with unique and varied backgrounds. We are as diverse as the students and communities we serve. Continue to share your stories as the Alberta Teachers' Association does in its many publications, including our award-winning *ATA Magazine*. By sharing our stories, we not only advocate for our profession, but also inspire the next generation to find their own voices and tell their own truths. 

Les histoires nous font avancer

PARMI LES FACTEURS M'AYANT POUSSÉ À VOULOIR enseigner l'anglais et l'art dramatique, il y a le pouvoir d'une histoire vraiment exceptionnelle. Les histoires transportent le lecteur ou l'auditoire ailleurs, à une autre époque, et nous permettent de vivre de nouvelles expériences, de découvrir différents points de vue et de nous interroger sur le passé et l'avenir.

Les histoires sont un moyen d'établir des liens entre nous et elles peuvent transformer des vies. Ce fut un privilège et un bonheur d'en témoigner quotidiennement dans ma salle de classe. L'art de raconter des histoires, c'est aussi un procédé grâce auquel mes élèves ont souvent réussi à faire en sorte que je m'écarte du sujet abordé en classe. Même si je devinais toujours leur stratagème, je leur faisais souvent plaisir avec une anecdote de ma jeunesse que je trouvais une façon de mettre en rapport avec la leçon du jour.

Les enseignants sont des conteurs naturels et j'encourage mes collègues à raconter les histoires qui prennent forme dans leurs salles de classe, car il s'agit d'un moyen de défendre les intérêts de leurs élèves ainsi que l'éducation publique. À travers ces histoires, nous établissons des liens avec des personnes qui ne comprennent peut-être pas ce qui se passe dans le milieu de l'éducation publique. Les statistiques peuvent être une excellente source d'information; souvent toutefois, c'est l'histoire dont elles sont accompagnées qui marque davantage les esprits. C'est l'histoire qui nous interpelle et nous touche. C'est l'histoire qui nous révèle le cœur, le côté humain.

Les enseignants proviennent d'horizons uniques et variés. Notre diversité reflète celle des élèves et des communautés que nous servons. Continuez à raconter vos histoires comme le fait l'Alberta Teachers' Association dans ses nombreuses publications, y compris notre revue primée, l'*ATA Magazine*. Faire connaître nos histoires, c'est non seulement défendre les intérêts de notre profession, mais aussi inspirer les membres de la prochaine génération à trouver leur propre voix et à faire entendre leur propre vérité. 



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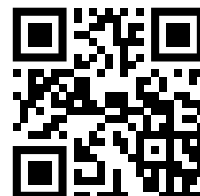
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to *teach* at CAIS

Archival issues of the **ATA Magazine** can be just as relevant now as they were when originally published, or they can remind us how far we've come. You decide.

Check out these items from the January/February 1995 issue of the **ATA Magazine**, which took a look at, among other topics, diversity in schools.



Diversity and inclusion

30 YEARS AGO

“

Schools need to be places where people grow in the conviction they have value, they can help shape their worlds and they can know the pleasure of transformation, individually and communally.

To live together successfully in schools all of us — students, teachers, administrators, janitors, secretaries, resource persons — must learn to embrace the paradox of community without unity, community with diversity. By acknowledging and celebrating diversity we can create communities in which security and dignity and compassion and care are all joyfully present. Genuine community will be known in the experience of unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

— Carl Leggo
“The School As A Community”

“

It takes hope to notice the teachable moment. It takes courage to try something new. It takes vision and hope especially when you've been doing it for six or more years. But you can only give hope to others if you have hope in yourself.

This is why teachers, too, must be lifelong learners, vibrant and celebrating life. This is the only way we can transmit to students a world that is richer and more satisfying than the media's illusory promises of affluence, glamor and success.

— David Knight
“Somebody Deserves a Medal”

“

Excellence in teaching is more than getting the day's lesson plans done. It's about dealing with a class and treating each member in that class as a human being, each with his or her own worth and dignity.

— Winnifred Settle
“A Mother's View of Integration”





ILLUSTRATION BY MATEUSZ NAPIERALSKI

Schools, war and the rights of children

Education International takes stand on schools as safe havens in wartime

Lisa Everitt

Executive Staff Officer, ATA

ACCORDING TO THE UNITED Nations Children’s Fund (2025), as of July 2022, 196 countries had signed onto the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, legally binding those signatories to guaranteeing certain rights for children, regardless of their race, ability, religion, gender or country of origin. These rights, outlined in 54 articles, include the right to education and to learn.

Specifically, article 28 states that signatories must commit to making primary and secondary education free and accessible, encourage children to attend school and work to reduce dropout rates, maintain safe and caring spaces that preserve the child’s dignity, and collaborate

with other countries to eliminate ignorance and illiteracy. Article 29 outlines the goal of education as helping young people fully nurture their gifts and talents and preparing them to live independently as contributing members of society. Where war and armed conflict occur, these rights, along with the right to life, survival and development (article 6), are threatened.

The United Nations Children’s Fund estimates that, at the end of 2023, 31.3 million children were displaced within their own countries, “the vast majority of them (28.1 million) because of conflict and violence, which is more than twice the number of children displaced across

borders as refugees” (8). As the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (2011) states, “Schools and hospitals must be zones of peace, where children are granted protection even in times of conflict. Yet, there is an increasing trend of schools and hospitals being attacked with detrimental effects on children.”

The office (2013) identified six grave violations, derived from international law, that represent the most serious offences committed during periods of armed conflict. One of the violations is attacks on schools and hospitals. Prohibiting such attacks recognizes the foundational roles schools and hospitals play in functioning

societies and reinforces the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This past summer, at the 10th World Congress of Education International, teacher organizations, including representatives of the Canadian Teachers' Federation and the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), called for the protection of children and systems of education during wartime. The congress passed two resolutions: The Effect of War on Education and Children, and Education and Wellbeing of Children During Periods of Military Conflict.

The Effect on War on Education and Children recognizes that "the world is currently experiencing a rise in armed conflict, with some states choosing to ignore international laws that protect education institutions, education, and civilians especially children" (Education International 2024b). The resolution notes that aggressors who target education during war are doing so to destroy the nation, pointing to education as a key feature for sustaining peace and democracy.

When children are affected by war, they are less likely to complete primary education, and this has generational effects, including poverty, inequality and poor health outcomes. Considering these impacts, the resolution urges member organizations to use education to build critical thinking in students to "challenge oppression, tyranny, and inequality" (Education International 2024b) and to condemn war and countries complicit in war.

Finally, the resolution calls on the Education International executive board and member organizations to advocate for and support international guidelines that identify the protection of schools and universities during wartime and affirms that schools and hospitals should be safe havens during wartime.

The Education and Wellbeing of Children During Periods of Military Conflict resolution recognizes that many students and teachers are affected by crises such as war, identifying in particular that "two thirds of children in Ukraine are either learning online or through a mix of online and in-person" and that "many children and young people in Palestine are unable to access even a basic entitlement to education, with schools closed and teachers

struggling to provide virtual learning" (Education International 2024^a).

During armed conflict, teachers are often in unsafe areas, not able to access resources and compensation and, when they are refugees in other countries, unable to have their credentials fully recognized. This resolution condemns the increasing attacks on education infrastructure, students and educators, which can include banning girls and women from participating in education or attacking and kidnapping girls who attend school.

The resolution calls on governments, especially in the global north, to fulfill their international obligations to hold nations violating international laws accountable, and provide resources and support to students and teachers impacted by armed conflict. The resolution also calls for collaboration with non-governmental organizations to support those impacted by war. Teachers' unions are also called on to establish a global fund to pay teachers' salaries in emergencies, amplify the views of educators working in areas of conflict, and raise awareness of the issues faced by students and teachers in those areas.

ATA representatives were well equipped to support the resolutions put forward at the Congress with the passage of the following resolution, now policy 24.4.0.4:

Be it resolved that the Association urge the Canadian Teachers' Federation, through Education International, to advocate with responsible international bodies to designate schools and educational institutions as sanctuary spaces, making their occupation, conversion to military purposes or destruction by military forces (including irregular military forces) a crime under international humanitarian law.

As teacher organizations provincially, federally and internationally, we must help to build a brighter future for everyone affected by armed conflict. ^{ATA}

“**Schools and hospitals must be zones of peace, where children are granted protection even in times of conflict.**”

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Kristine Hinton: Giving time, inspiring connection

Karen Gill

Staff Writer, ATA Magazine

In the heart of Okotoks, Kristine Hinton is not just a dedicated teacher but also an inspiration for her community. Hinton's journey is one of leadership, empathy and a deep commitment to making a difference.

Hinton's volunteer spirit took root in her childhood, as her mother always encouraged the family to reach out and help others.

"Sometimes you can't afford to donate things, but you can give the gift of time," Hinton says.

While delving into volunteerism was easy for Hinton, taking on leadership roles didn't come as naturally to her.

As a teenager, Hinton knew she was shy. At the same time, she was driven to make a difference and to become a strong leader, so she pushed herself to take a leadership course to prove to herself that she had the ability to lead.

Following that course, Hinton both demonstrated and honed her leadership capacity through her service to the community. Over the past few decades, she has volunteered for more than 15 different organizations.

"I feel that you can be a leader in so many ways and people don't see they're strong leaders themselves, but they truly have it in them."


One memorable moment in Hinton's volunteer journey was coaching a dragon boat team composed of breast cancer survivors. Witnessing their triumph over adversity reminded her of the profound impact that people can have on the lives of others.

"That was the moment I just went, wow. It was a wonderful feeling seeing what they were capable of and helping them get there."

For Hinton, serving others and being a leader has seeped into her career as a teacher as well.

Hinton has taken on various roles that serve the teaching profession, including school representative, local communications officer, occupational health and safety executive member, and Palliser District Teachers' Convention Association committee member. She has also been actively working to establish a Women in Leadership Committee in her local.

Beyond her volunteer endeavors, Hinton finds balance through family time, participation in community arts and cultural events and staying physically active.

Kristine Hinton's story is one of dedication, giving time, making connections, and leaving a lasting mark on her community and profession. 

► **Got an idea?** *Unsung Hero* is a space dedicated to honouring ATA members past and present who have had notable achievements, either in the ATA or in their private lives.

If you know of a member whom you feel should be recognized, please contact section editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn at lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

Kristine Hinton

ATA Health and Physical
Education Council
executive member

Calgary Area Field Experiences
Committee member

MyCityCare Shop of
Wonders volunteer

ILLUSTRATION BY RACHEL WADA



ISTOCK

Politics as ‘medicine writ large’

Public health care should take lessons from public education, writes former health minister

Shelley Svidal

Staff Writer, *ATA Magazine*

HEALTH CARE IN CANADA IS IN A STATE of crisis, and Jane Philpott, a doctor who served as federal minister of health from 2015 to 2019, has something to say about it. Part treatise on health care, part autobiography, *Health for All: A Doctor’s Prescription for a Healthier Canada* examines the clinical, spiritual, social and political dimensions of health and offers up solutions for what ails the health care system.

Philpott begins her book by recounting a day in Niger during one of her missions to the West African country as a volunteer with Médecins Sans Frontières. Her task that day was to screen children for severe malnutrition, sending the sickest children to the Centre de Recuperation Nutritionnelle Intensive in the city.

“During the years we lived [in Niger], I watched children die of starvation in a world that has plenty of food. Living in one of the poorest countries on earth taught me that while health is much more than health care, the people of Niger were terribly

lacking in both,” she writes. “[Canada is] also far from achieving evenly distributed opportunities for people to be well.”

In part one, Philpott shifts her attention to Canada and the clinical underpinnings of health. Noting that, according to the 2023 survey OurCare, 6.5 million Canadians, or 22 per cent of the population, do not have a family doctor or nurse practitioner, she advocates for a primary care home for all.

“Simply put, we must make it a reality that every person living in Canada has a primary care home, just as every Canadian child has access to a public school,” she writes.

That home would be staffed not only by doctors and nurse practitioners but also by nurses, physiotherapists, midwives, social workers, and other health and allied health practitioners. To effect a primary care home for all, Philpott urges the federal government to implement a Canadian primary care act as a complement to the *Canada Health Act*.

“You set out the principles in the program criteria so Canadians know what they can expect. Commit to federal investments. Make it clear that if provinces are noncompliant, the federal contribution will be reduced or withheld.”

In part two, Philpott examines the spiritual dimensions of mental wellness — hope, belonging, meaning and purpose — which constitute the four core elements of the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum (FNMWC) framework.

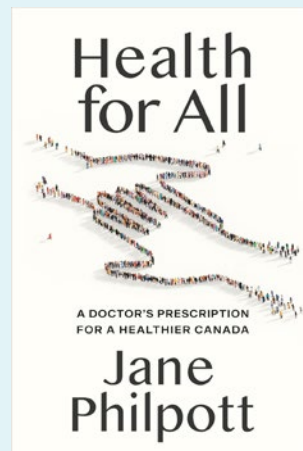
“To be physically well, we all know that you have to have nutritious food, some exercise and regular check-ups with your health care team. We also understand the social factors that are widely understood as determinants of health. . . . But until I came across the FNMWC framework, I never had a list of factors to help me understand the underpinnings of spiritual wellness.”

The social determinants of health, including education and literacy, income and social status, employment and working conditions, childhood experiences, and social supports and coping skills, are the stuff of part three. Philpott explains them by telling stories of real people.



Health is the result of so much more than health care. If we want a healthy population, we need to invest in the upstream factors that determine wellness.”

- Jane Philpott



Health for All: A Doctor's Prescription for a Healthier Canada

Jane Philpott

Penguin Random House Canada, 2024

“Health is the result of so much more than health care,” Philpott writes. “If we want a healthy population, we need to invest in the upstream factors that determine wellness.”

In part four, Philpott turns to the political dimensions of health and explains her decision to enter the political arena. “Politics is nothing but medicine writ large,” she writes. “It’s the leap from healing individuals to healing society. Politicians set the societal rules that have a profound impact on who will be well. For me, the move to politics was simply a way to improve people’s health on a grander scale.”


At times heartbreaking and at times heartwarming, *Health for All: A Doctor's Prescription for a Healthier Canada* offers a detailed roadmap for resolving Canada’s health care crisis. 



ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL PARILLAS

Code red

Is coding still a thing?

Q&A with Darren Maltais, Technology Integration Facilitator, Black Gold School Division

CODING IN THE CLASSROOM has been a buzzy topic for several years, but is it still relevant? Darren Maltais, a technology integration facilitator and member of the Education Technology Council of the ATA, shares his insight on the use of coding in a K-12 context.

Can you update teachers on where coding appears in the new curriculum?

Coding is just one component of the new science curriculum. It's now found in the kindergarten-Grade 6 curriculum in the organizing idea of "computer science." Computational thinking, which is a logical step-by-step solution to problems, is a major part of what we hope to teach in computer science. There's also a design-thinking component.

With computers and/or AI able to do a lot of coding, how relevant is it for students to learn to code?


Just like we're not going to stop teaching writing because we have generative AI, the same is true of coding. We don't necessarily teach narrative writing so that every student will become a writer, or math skills so they become mathematicians. It's the thinking behind those skills that is more important. The problem-solving skills and creativity involved in coding and computational thinking are applicable to many occupations, especially teaching!

How can teachers use coding for curricular outcomes other than those found in career and technology areas?

In addition to the problem-solving skills we're teaching in computer science, another fun and engaging aspect of coding is using it to create cross-curricular projects for other science topics. Grade 1 students can code robots to learn about energy; Grade 2 students can code in ScratchJr or with Micro:bit to learn about sound and light; Grade 5 and 6 students can code projects related to renewable energy sources with climate action kits. There are so many possibilities.

Teachers are already masters at computational thinking: breaking a problem down into parts, finding patterns and applying those solutions to new problems they encounter. It's also already a component of many of our lessons in every subject area, but we might not call it computational thinking — it may look like story analysis or math word problems.

How can a student's experience with coding progress through their K–12 years?

In elementary and into junior high, we're mainly focusing on block coding, which is a way to create programs by dragging and dropping visual blocks of code together. This can be done in a variety of platforms, then we can transition into learning about line coding with languages like Python that high school courses may focus on. 

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE

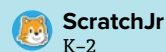


STEM & Robotics ERP Mini Set

Designed for students aged 7 to 9, this robotics kit can make 40 different models of robots and comes with digital access to lesson plans.

Available through the ATA library.

RECOMMENDED CODING PLATFORMS



ScratchJr
K-2

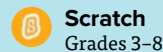


CS First
Grades 3+

See an introductory video below:



Micro:bit
Grades 2-9



Scratch
Grades 3-8



INSTA INNOVATORS

Five Instagram accounts that are must-follows for teachers:



@etc.ata



@isteconnects



@aac.ab.ca



@the.unteachables



@tcea_org



ILLUSTRATED BY BIANCA HO

Mind the gap

Recognizing socioeconomic diversity in schools

Lindsay Yakimyshyn

Associate Editor, *ATA Magazine*

Andrea Berg

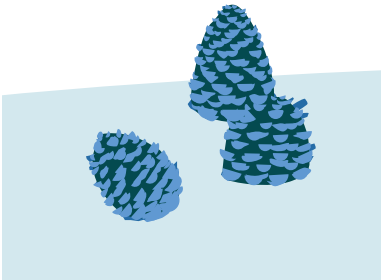
Associate Coordinator PD, ATA

NOT EVERYONE HAS ACCESS TO THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES and resources, whether we look around the province or within an individual school.

Some students come to school ready to learn, equipped with the newest tools they need to complete whatever task their teacher throws their way. Some students show up wanting to learn, but with their attention pulled by a pang of hunger or the pain of thawing fingers — breakfast is scarce this week, and the old mittens are showing their wear.

Socioeconomic disparities appear in multiple ways, including through students' different levels of access to extracurricular activities, supplementary academic supports (e.g., tutors), and health and wellness supports that could impact learning. Even at-home access to technology and internet varies significantly, affecting a student's ability to access learning tools and their family's ability to stay up to date on class and school events.

Such barriers to learning are sometimes mitigated through in-school and community programs that help meet students' basic and learning needs, with teachers and school leaders often being key to students and families finding the support they need. However, recognizing and respecting diverse socioeconomic backgrounds also serves to support those in our school community.



Socioeconomic privilege: The benefits available to an individual due to their income, education and level of financial security as well as perceptions of class and status based on these factors (socioeconomic status).

Classism: Discriminatory practices and biases, for or against, based on socioeconomic status.

Source: *The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion's "Glossary of IDEA Terms"*



4 ways to help students thrive

1. Be proactive

- » Actively facilitate classroom discussions (either planned or organic) to ensure they are inclusive and alert to all students' needs and backgrounds.
- » Consider whether all students have access to the tools and resources — both in class and at home — to participate in the assignment in an equitable way. Are there external supports that can help bridge the gap?

2. Dig deeper


- » Nurture the special talents and skills of all students, and create opportunities for everyone to positively contribute.
- » Challenge your own unconscious biases. Even as you ensure supports are available, be mindful not to assume what students can and can't do.

3. Build spaces of support

- » Foster a safe and supportive environment where those in the school community feel comfortable discussing their needs.
- » Where appropriate, help connect students and their families to community resources.

4. Take a step

- » Take professional development focused on enhancing awareness and understanding of socioeconomic diversity.
- » Encourage civic engagement from all students to build awareness of social inequities and to encourage students to advocate for themselves.
- » Consider ways to extend or enhance inclusive practices in your school community.

Socioeconomic disparity is not always obvious, and the solutions are not easy. However, being more attuned to all facets of diversity helps us build a stronger learning and teaching environment. As teachers and school leaders, we can foster a safe and inclusive environment by taking a mindful approach to how we teach and how we collaborate with those in our school community, taking steps to ensure that all students know they belong. 

HAVE AN IDEA FOR ACTIVATING CHANGE? APPLY FOR A DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS (DEHR) GRANT!

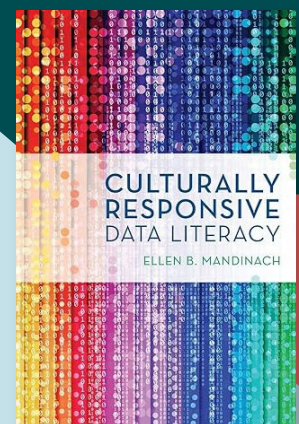
Each year, the DEHR grant program sponsors innovative projects that promote the principles of diversity, equity and human rights and that aim to advance knowledge, develop skills and foster inclusive behaviour among students, teachers and the community.

Amount: Up to \$2,000

Deadline: April 30, 5 p.m.

Application form and more information available on the ATA website under Professional Development > Grants, Awards and Scholarships > Grants for locals

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE



Culturally Responsive Data Literacy

Ellen B Mandinach

Available through the ATA library.



Astounding AND UNSETTLING

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS REVOLUTIONIZING EDUCATION

Phil McRae

Associate Coordinator, Research, ATA

WE ARE CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING a surge in the availability and capabilities of artificial intelligence (AI) — an intelligence explosion — that is leading to a transformation of a variety of fields, including K–12 education.

AI is becoming a defining force in education, reshaping Alberta classrooms and influencing teaching practices in ways that were unimaginable a few years ago. As Alberta teachers, we are at the front lines of this shift and must approach it with an innate curiosity tempered by a healthy dose of caution — cautiously optimistic as a mindful approach.

As we move beyond the current landscape of AI tools into an era where AI systems become an increasingly prominent feature of education, we must remain vigilant in our ethical considerations, ensuring that AI serves to empower rather than undermine the highly relational (and human) elements of teaching and learning.

AI offers exciting possibilities for all our classrooms, but it also presents some unsettling challenges that require a thoughtful and critical examination by the profession, especially regarding its impact on decision making involving children and youth, its impact on trust, teacher professional judgement, cognitive atrophy, student and teacher privacy, and the increasing inequality across our provincial public education system.



ILLUSTRATION BY BIANCA HO, SUPPORTED BY FIREFLY

WHAT IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)? AI ... ANI ... AGI

AT ITS CORE, artificial intelligence (AI) is an emerging system of technologies built around artificial “neural networks” that are focused on mimicking human cognitive abilities, such as reasoning, learning and problem solving. While machine neural nets operate differently than human neural networks, they are both profound in their abilities.

Today, most AI tools used in educational settings fall under the umbrella of artificial narrow intelligence (ANI) — systems designed to excel in specific tasks like text generation, data analysis and digital content creation, including generative AI models like Copilot or ChatGPT that specialize in creating original content based on input data.

Generative AI, in particular, is transforming Alberta classrooms by streamlining lesson planning, generating creative

and new learning materials, supporting differentiated instruction and assessment, translating and simplifying texts or video, and assisting with specialized educational needs like individual support plans, and language accessibility for students. A growing concern at the moment is the use of AI for real-time assessments and automated grading, which, while potentially offering insights into student progress, also raises significant questions about student privacy, the security of uploaded data, algorithmic or data bias, and the potential for overreach of AI-driven decisionmaking in K–12 educational contexts. (See section on moral passivity on page 21.)

In the next few years, we may witness a shift from isolated tools to integrated intelligent systems that could evolve into artificial general intelligence (AGI), which is a theoretical form of AI capable of understanding and performing tasks at a human-like level across diverse domains. If and when AGI arises, we will begin to see a decline in human exceptionalism and a considerable rise in automation. However, AGI remains, for now, a speculative concept. ^{ATA}

FROM FOREIGN CONCEPT TO ESSENTIAL TOOL

One teacher's journey with AI

Melissa Wall

Guest Contributor

My journey with AI started when I attended a presentation by a teaching colleague who is a subject matter expert. I was blown away by everything AI could do! It opened my eyes to just how powerful and versatile this technology is. What really struck me was how AI could simplify tasks, offer creative ideas and provide new ways to handle tasks that usually take up a lot of time. Since then, I've been using AI for all kinds of tasks, making my life a whole lot easier, both personally and professionally.

Some of my preferred AI tools include ChatGPT, Copilot, MagicSchool, Gamma.app, Diffit.me, and Goblin.tools. Each of these platforms brings unique features that enhance productivity, learning and creativity. I've used these tools for everything from personal projects to school-related tasks. On a personal level, I've planned meals complete with grocery lists, created running schedules and assembled a fun birthday scavenger hunt for my kids! I even used AI to help figure out how to treat my son's swimmer's ear by having it ask me questions.

A GAME CHANGER IN THE CLASSROOM

When it comes to my classroom, AI has been a game changer. I've used it to break down novels to match the reading level of my struggling students and to add comprehension questions that reinforce their understanding. It has also been a huge help in pulling together resources and materials that I can use in my lessons. I use it for writing emails and adjusting the tone to fit different situations, setting individual support plan goals and drafting strategies that align with those goals. It even assisted me in coming up

with questions for a survey I sent to parents.

The best part of this entire journey has been how much time I've saved. AI helps me complete tasks much faster and summarize large amounts of information in a more concise way. Of course, as with anything, there have been a few bumps along the way. I've run into moments where the information provided wasn't completely accurate or up to date, so I've learned the importance of always double-checking the facts.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS

One of the biggest surprises for me was how easy AI is to use. Initially, I expected it to be a complicated process, but it turned out to be straightforward and user friendly. Once I got the hang of it, I could weave it into my daily routine and workflow without any major hurdles.

Overall, AI has become an essential tool in my teaching toolkit. It's helping me to be more efficient and effective in what I do, and it's helping me better support my students. I'm excited to keep exploring what else AI can offer and find even more ways to incorporate it into both my personal and professional world. ^{ATA}



Melissa Wall is a learning support teacher at Gilbert Paterson Middle School in Lethbridge.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL PABILLAS

Moral PASSIVITY

The potential impact of AI on teacher autonomy and moral agency

WHILE AI IS CELEBRATED for its efficiency, it also introduces significant ethical concerns, such as algorithmic bias and the potential erosion of professional decision making. We must critically engage with these systems to ensure they uphold fairness, transparency and ethical standards.

For the past eight years, the ATA has been conducting an AI scoping research project, and one of the most pressing concerns raised is the risk of moral passivity. As AI becomes more integrated into decisionmaking processes involving K–12 schools, there is a danger that education decision makers may come to rely too heavily on machine-generated recommendations, surrendering their professional judgment in favour of algorithms.

For example, a school system runs all of its data through an AI system to analyze probabilities of success for their various students. When the analysis is done, it identifies individual students who it deems have a low probability of success, and then makes decisions and sets directions based on this analysis, potentially removing hope and helpful resources that could intervene in that child's life.

Moral passivity, and the handing off of decision making to machine learning, could ultimately lead to a deskilling of the teaching profession, where teachers are no longer exercising the full range of moral and ethical reasoning that is essential for making decisions in the best interests of their students. Maintaining teacher autonomy is one of the best ways to ensure AI tools and systems remain subordinate to the professional judgment of teachers who are closest to their students. I often find it helpful to frame it like this: the AI system does not know if the child has eaten breakfast or whether they just had a conflict with another student moments ago in the hallway, or what is going on within their complex and unique human selves. ^{ATA}



AI AS A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TOOL FOR TEACHERS

Danny Maas

Acting Associate Coordinator,
Professional Development, ATA

AI TECHNOLOGY IS TRANSFORMING education, and its potential for supporting teacher development is just beginning to be realized. Beyond classroom use, AI can serve as a powerful tool for teachers' own professional learning. Here are three ways teachers can leverage AI to enhance their professional growth and learning.

1. LEARNING NEW KNOWLEDGE OR SKILLS

For teachers who may be teaching new grades, subjects or topics, AI can act as a helpful tutor. By asking an AI chatbot to explain concepts or break down complex material, teachers can quickly grasp new knowledge and build confidence in teaching unfamiliar subjects. Whether it's understanding a scientific concept or exploring new teaching strategies, AI can support teachers in efficiently gaining the expertise they need to engage their students effectively.

2. PERSONALIZED COACHING


AI offers an accessible form of personalized coaching, enabling teachers to seek targeted feedback and advice on improving their teaching practices. Teachers can ask an AI chatbot for suggestions on classroom management, student engagement or differentiated instruction tailored to their specific challenges. This instant coaching can serve as a supplement to traditional professional development, offering guidance whenever it's needed, right at their fingertips. While AI doesn't replace the expertise of our instructional coach colleagues, it can offer teachers an additional on-demand coaching option.

3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

AI chatbots can help teachers quickly access research, articles or summaries on education-related topics like classroom management, student engagement and the latest pedagogical approaches. Potentially more effective than an internet search, it's like having a personalized research assistant available 24/7 that can offer summaries of materials teachers feed to it or even develop its own materials for teachers to learn from.

PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

While AI can be a valuable tool for professional learning, it's important for teachers to use their professional knowledge and judgment when evaluating AI-generated content. AI outputs may sometimes be biased, inaccurate or misaligned with best practices in education. Teachers should critically assess any suggestions or information AI provides to ensure they meet professional standards and align with sound teaching practices and school division policies. Cross-referencing AI-generated materials with trusted educational resources will help mitigate the risk of AI hallucinations or misinformation.

For assistance in learning more about effective AI prompting to generate high-quality results, feel free to contact the ATA PD team at PD@ata.ab.ca. 



A staff officer in the Professional Development (PD) program area of the Alberta Teachers' Association, Danny Maas is a subject matter expert in the productive use of AI by teachers.



EMBRACING CHANGE

How AI is shaping my music classroom

Becki Leipert

Guest Contributor

As I reflect on my two decades of teaching music, I'm struck by how much has changed. I remember when my shelves were lined with MusicPlay binders and countless music books filled with songs and games my students loved. Now, I have access to endless resources online. Platforms like Beth's Notes, Musicplay Online, Musescore and YouTube make it simple to find new songs and dances.

And then there's artificial intelligence (AI). My realization of how I can maximize my use of existing and emerging technology came at an ATA session with Chris Gonsalves, a PD staff officer, who shared how AI can lighten teachers' workloads. Now AI is transforming how I plan concerts, create songs and even draft emails.

While planning concerts and assemblies, I use AI to generate ideas. Music teachers often work in isolation, and collaboration can be scarce. That's where AI comes in. When I'm brainstorming a concert theme, I input my thoughts into an AI tool, which suggests songs and concepts I might not have considered.

ORIGINAL SONGS IN SECONDS

One of my favourite resources is Suno .com. It enables my students and me to input keywords and generate original songs in seconds. When we needed a song about walking quietly in the hallway, Suno created one in minutes. My students love collaborating and enjoy hearing the unique compositions AI produces. These experiences have sparked excellent discussions about song styles, and many students have explored this tool at home.

Another gem is vocalremover.org, which lets me upload songs and remove vocals, turning them into karaoke tracks. We recently used it for our school's Diwali celebration, allowing students to sing along with authentic music while showcasing their voices. AI helps us adapt resources to meet our school and student needs.

ChatGPT is a useful tool for writing scripts and programs for assemblies and concerts. Last year, I requested a script focused on songs and poems about immigrant experiences in Canada. AI not only generated a script but also wrote poems and lyrics to songs that would create a complete show. Sadly, none of these poems and songs could be attributed to a human author, so I chose to feature public works from Canadian poets and musicians instead. This query reminded me that while AI can be helpful, teachers must still judge the quality and authenticity of what we share with our students. I continue to cautiously approach ChatGPT and always double-check the content I use. It's essential to ensure everything I share is accurate and reflects the message that I am trying to convey.

Twenty years ago, I never could have imagined having access to such powerful AI tools. Now, when asked to write a school song, I can confidently respond, "Of course! What do you have in mind?" With AI as my ally, the creative process feels more exciting and inspiring. ^{ATA}



Becki Leipert is a music specialist at Monterey Park School in Calgary.

THE ETHICAL *Dilemmas* OF GENERATIVE AI

GENERATIVE AI, particularly large language models like Copilot or ChatGPT, have introduced new opportunities for content creation in our classrooms. However, it also challenges fundamental educational values like creativity, originality, copyright and academic integrity. While AI-generated essays and artworks can serve as useful learning tools, they also raise questions about the purpose of education: Is it about producing the "right" answer or fostering the creative process itself?

Further, as AI systems become more capable, they threaten to displace human critical (and potentially creative) thinking. This shift could lead to a reliance on prepackaged, AI-generated solutions rather than encouraging students to grapple with complex problems themselves, raising concerns about cognitive atrophy.

Additionally, the increasing access to a variety of AI tools and systems, some with many more capabilities than others, may widen existing inequities in education. Students and teachers with greater access to advanced AI technologies could gain a significant advantage over those in underresourced schools, leading to a deeper digital divide. This disparity could further exacerbate the growing inequity across Alberta schools, giving some students enhanced support and opportunity for exploration while others fall further and further behind. ^{ATA}



FROM PROMPTS TO CONVERSATIONS

Cogenerating content through collaboration with AI

Chris Gonsalvez

Executive Staff Officer, ATA Professional Development

“Create a lesson plan on adding fractions.”

“Please create a short unit exam on the parts of a plant.”

“Help me write a letter to parents about our upcoming field trip to the zoo.”

These are all common prompts that teachers across the country use when they open up AI platforms like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot or Google Gemini. While these prompts yield rapid results, the overall success of such queries can be mixed.

At its core, AI aims to return a result, even if it is not fully aware of the end user’s needs. If it misunderstands or does not know the answer, it will simply make something up to appear successful. As a result, many queries return minimally helpful results. We can change this. We need to change this. When engaging with artificial intelligence, we need to start viewing this technology as a cointelligence or collaborator rather than a mind-reading assistant. Such a shift moves us from being consumers of data produced by artificial intelligence to cocreators of output results. We do this by encouraging the AI system to ask us questions before and while it is creating an output for us. Encourage the AI to seek clarification from you prior to producing anything for you.

EXAMPLE NO. 1



Here's a typical prompt that would result in a relatively mundane response:

Create a lesson plan about the parts of a plant.



A better, "cogenerative" prompt would be

I am a grade 7 teacher in Alberta and would like an engaging opening lesson to teach about the parts of a plant. I would like your assistance with this. First, please ask me five questions, one at a time. Allow me to respond to each question prior to asking the next question. After I have answered all five questions, please give me three ideas for how to open this unit with my students.



While this new prompt may take longer to craft, the results will be immeasurably better. The AI may ask questions about how long you have, who your students are, what supplies you have access to or your teaching style. All of this information will be used to create a much more targeted output. The better your responses to the AI's questions, the better your overall results will be.

The most important part of the dialogue prompt is "ask me one question at a time and allow me to respond prior to asking the next question." Without this, you will often get a list of questions and a response that does not include your input.


EXAMPLE NO. 2



Another example of a cogenerative prompt could be:

I am a Grade 4 teacher in Edmonton, Alberta. I have a wonderful class of students that we call the Gonzo's Greats. My students call me Mr. G. I write a weekly email home to families to inform them about things that happened this week, what we have been covering in class and important reminders for the upcoming week. I would like you to act as an engaging Grade 4 teacher and assist me with my writing of this weekly email. I would like you to ask me four questions, one at a time, allowing me to answer before the next question is posed. Upon my answering the fourth question, please craft a concise but witty and engaging email home that I can send to parents



The old adage, "garbage in, garbage out," also applies to our work with AI. The more information we can provide in our prompts, the better the overall result will be. By encouraging AI systems to ask us questions and engaging in meaningful dialogues with AI, users can unlock new possibilities and drive new innovations in their teaching. 



A staff officer in the Professional Development (PD) program area of the Alberta Teachers' Association, Chris Gonsalvez is a subject matter expert in the productive use of AI by teachers.

WORKSHOP AVAILABLE

PD staff at the ATA have conducted extensive research into ways that teachers can use artificial intelligence. Based on their findings, they have developed a high-energy workshop, AI Tools to Amplify Your Professionalism and Save Time, which has delivered cutting-edge knowledge and techniques to hundreds of teachers throughout the province. For more information about bringing this workshop into your school or PD event, email pdworkshops@ata.ab.ca.



ISTOCK

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR ADMINISTRATORS

How officials at one school used AI to create their goals for the year

Thomas Rogers

Guest Contributor

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE has led to new and exciting opportunities for administrators to analyze large swaths of data. This fall, staff and administrators at our school used AI to conduct a school results review and cocreate our school goals for the 2024–25 year. For this task, we used NotebookLM, Google’s AI-powered research assistant.



STEP 1: REVIEW PREVIOUS GOALS



Our first step involved having staff review the goals from last year’s school plan and answer three main questions:

1. What goals or data should we celebrate?
2. Which goals should we revise or review? OR What are some areas of challenge that still remain?
3. After reviewing our division priorities, is there anything different that we should consider as goals for this coming school year?

Staff answered these questions by thinking of specific anecdotes that applied to each one and recording their thoughts independently on a Google Doc. Staff then shared their stories in smaller groups.

STEP 2: HUMAN DATA REVIEW



Our second step was to divide staff into groups based on the school’s three goals from last year:

1. Literacy and numeracy
2. Antiracism and reconciliation
3. Student and staff well-being and mental health

We provided the groups with several data sources such as locally developed survey results, division and Alberta Assurance survey results from the last two years, Provincial Achievement Test results since 2022 and other quantitative and qualitative data sets. Staff engaged in further conversation in their groups and recorded their observations concerning our three main questions and three school goals.

STEP 3: AI DATA REVIEW



Our third step involved uploading our data to NotebookLM (with Google Education/Enterprise data protections), then asking questions. These questions ranged from suggestions on achieving improved results, different ways to measure the goals, potential barriers to improvement and multiple questions comparing data sets between several years. Staff validated or rejected each AI-generated response based on their understanding of the data and added to their notes any specific insights they felt were valid. This process produced several sets of notes totaling 12 pages.

STEP 4: CONSOLIDATE AND WRITE



The last step involved administrators consolidating these notes into a single, six-page document. The information was organized into three headings: Conclusions Based on School Goals/Looking Ahead, AI Co-creation, and 2024–2025 School Goals. Administrators used this summary as a reference while they wrote the 2024–2025 school goals, which serves as a guiding document for the whole school community. These goals include three key focus areas:

1. Improving students’ literacy and numeracy skills
2. Deepening our schools’ understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures and teachings as well as antiracism strategies
3. Improving students’ sense of belonging and safety

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

This process worked because the humans involved understood the data. Before using AI, the user must be familiar with the data. AI systems, like large language models (LLMs), cannot make professional judgments. They are computer programs designed to look for patterns that mimic intelligence but have none of their own. Without that expertise, humans will not be able to detect errors in the AI, leading to problems. AI cannot take responsibility or be held accountable; that remains our professional domain.

Education-specific versions of Microsoft's Copilot and Google's Gemini and NotebookLM are designed with educators in mind to protect data and privacy, enabling these tools to be more accessible for more tailored uses. For example, in the case of Gemini and NotebookLM, Google Education user uploads, queries and responses are not reviewed by human reviewers and are not used to train AI models.

The online FAQs for Gemini Enterprise state, "Your data is as secure when using Gemini as it is using any Google core service like Gmail or Docs."

Using public AI models without appropriate data security or privacy has several more pitfalls that educators must consider prior to use such as where the data is stored, who the data is shared with, whether the user maintains ownership of the data and whether it used to train the AI model. Without this additional layer of data security, only publicly available data should be used in LLMs and other AI technologies.

AI has the potential to cocreate and leverage our existing skills. We must remember that we need the background knowledge to verify the results to make responsible decisions. ^{ATA}



Thomas Rogers is an assistant principal at S. Bruce Smith Junior High School in Edmonton. He is pursuing his master's degree in educational studies, focusing on artificial intelligence and educational technology.

THE COGNITIVE COSTS OF AI: RISK OF *Cognitive Atrophy*

COGNITIVE ATROPHY IS the weakening of students' cognitive abilities due to overreliance on AI systems that can diminish students' capacity for deep learning. With AI increasingly handling tasks like writing, problem solving and even generating creative content, there is a risk that students will not fully develop their own critical thinking, memory, unique forms of creativity and problem-solving skills. Memory in particular is an interesting consideration, as we offload our recall capacity to intelligent systems in order to manage more and more of our lives. This raises the question: If a student can use AI to complete an assignment in seconds, what happens to the learning journey and all that is gained through that process?

The concern about cognitive atrophy is not limited to students — it also affects teachers. With AI performing tasks that once required significant cognitive engagement, such as lesson planning, grading, and instructional design, teachers risk losing the intellectual rigor that is essential to their own professional growth and development. ^{ATA}




ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL PARILLAS

THE *Future* OF AI IN EDUCATION: TEACHER AS COLLABORATOR OR AGENT?

AS AI TECHNOLOGIES CONTINUE TO EVOLVE, we are seeing a shift from AI as a tool to AI as a collaborator or even as “agent.” For instance, AI is increasingly being used to develop individually responsive learning plans, diagnose exceptionalities and even interact directly with students as virtual tutors. While these applications hold promise for enhancing learning, they also raise critical ethical questions: To what extent should we allow AI to take on substantive roles in the classroom? Will it reduce teachers to mere facilitators, or can it empower them to engage in more meaningful, creative and powerful pedagogies?

The rapid integration of AI in education brings both opportunities and risks. Alberta's teachers will play a critical role in shaping how these technologies are used in classrooms. By critically engaging with AI tools and systems, teachers can help create a future where technology enhances rather than diminishes the human experience in education. This requires ongoing professional development and thoughtful policy design.

It is essential that AI tools are designed and implemented in ways that respect teacher autonomy, prevent cognitive atrophy, and promote equity and inclusivity. We must ensure that AI systems are designed to complement teachers, not replace them, allowing teachers to maintain agency and uphold their professional responsibilities to help the next generation flourish. 



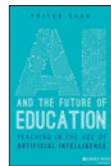
In his research role at the ATA, Phil McRae has for many years stayed up to date on the latest developments in artificial intelligence. He was recently appointed a special advisor on AI and education to the general secretary of Education International.

OUR FEATURE ARTWORK

The feature's illustrations are composed of original artwork combined with strategically integrated AI-generated visuals. Creating successful final imagery required adjustments to AI-generated results. Our experience demonstrated the importance of human craftsmanship and decision-making.

BOOKS

The following books on artificial intelligence are available through the ATA library.



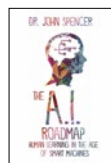
AI and the Future of Education: Teaching in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

While acknowledging the difficulties that AI has brought into the classroom, Priten Shah focuses on the benefits that using AI can give teachers and students. He challenges us to see how AI can move students to new achievements that seemed impossible previously.



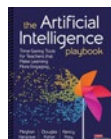
The AI Classroom: The Ultimate Guide to Artificial Intelligence in Education

The authors weren't kidding when they titled the book “the ultimate guide.” This was the most popular AI for teachers book of 2023.



The A.I. Roadmap: Human Learning in the Age of Smart Machines

Author John Spencer discusses the course through AI for teachers. He states that teachers should focus on the 21st century skills of creative thinking, project-based learning and information literacy for students, as these are the human skills needed in a world of smart machines.



The Artificial Intelligence Playbook: Time-Saving Tools for Teachers that Make Learning More Engaging

This excellent AI guide for teachers demonstrates ways that educators can use AI to engage students, differentiate lessons and assess learning in a fraction of the time usually needed for these tasks.



Brave New Words: How AI Will Revolutionize Education (and Why That's a Good Thing)

Author Salman Khan, the founder of the Khan Academy, examines the possible impacts of AI in the classroom and suggests ways that teachers and students can adapt to those changes.



Writing AI Prompts for Dummies

The way we ask AI to perform tasks has a major impact on the quality of the results we get. The authors guide readers through designing good prompts as well as giving advice on issues related to AI such as copyright.

- ▶ **How to borrow:** ATA library materials are shipped free of charge to members throughout the province. Loan periods are one month and include complimentary return postage. To access resources, contact library staff at library@ata.ab.ca.

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Alberta's early-career teachers facing significant challenges

Phil McRae

Associate Coordinator, Research, ATA



New teachers need a mentor who is in their school, someone who will actually check up on them at least once a week.”

—Survey participant

ALBERTA'S EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS are vital to the profession, fostering growth not only in students but also in their communities. They infuse schools across the province with innovative ideas and fresh perspectives. The *Teaching Profession Act* outlines the Alberta Teachers' Association's (ATA's) responsibilities in this area, including promoting teaching excellence among those new to the profession, supporting teacher preparation and certification programs, and advancing professional growth across the career of a teacher.

Entering the teaching profession has always presented unique challenges. However, in today's context of large class sizes, increased complexity and underfunding, these challenges have only intensified. Recognizing the limited research on early-career teaching, the ATA, in partnership with Thelma Gunn of the University of Lethbridge as coprincipal investigator, initiated a groundbreaking longitudinal study of early-career teachers. This research now has over five years of survey data, both before and after the pandemic. It delves into the lived experiences of Alberta's early-career teachers, highlighting their voices and the obstacles they face, and proposes strategies to help them flourish in their roles.



TOP CHALLENGES FOR EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS

- Navigating bureaucratic demands
- Classroom management and supporting diverse learners
- Their own mental health

UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEX ALBERTA CONTEXT

The 2024 research underscores a backdrop of increasing workload and declining job satisfaction for beginning teachers. These challenges, which the entire profession is enduring, are compounded by classroom complexities, rising misinformation and disinformation about the teaching profession, literacy and numeracy testing that teachers see as low value, curriculum that is developmentally inappropriate, and communities where K-12 education is becoming increasingly politicized and polarized. New teachers often describe feeling overwhelmed as they navigate growing bureaucratic demands, coordination of student behaviour and engagement, and their own mental health.

The survey results reveal critical gaps in the education system with respect to demographics, mentorship, preparedness and inclusion.

The ATA's research identifies five essential strategies to help early-career teachers not only survive but also thrive in their professional journeys.

1 MENTORSHIP (FORMAL OR INFORMAL)

Beginning teachers repeatedly emphasize the need for **meaningful mentorship**.

"New teachers need a mentor who is in their school," one participant noted, "someone who will actually check up on them at least once a week."

Effective mentorship fosters a sense of belonging and professional growth, yet 79 per cent of respondents report the absence of a formal mentor in their schools.

2 WORKLOAD AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORTS

Teachers consistently report the overwhelming nature of bureaucratic and administrative tasks. **Reducing unnecessary paperwork**, especially in relation to growing literacy and numeracy testing, along with **removing "red-tape" administrative duties** that are unnecessary may significantly improve teachers' ability to focus on teaching.

3 CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND BEHAVIOUR SUPPORTS

Managing classroom behaviour remains a significant challenge for many new teachers. Professional development tailored to practical **behaviour management strategies** (rather than abstract theories) can equip teachers to build positive and effective learning environments. Teachers also request **targeted resources** to support diverse learners and inclusive education.


4 MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The research highlights a crisis in teacher well-being, not unlike the three in four across the profession who have moderate to extreme concerns about teacher mental health. Unrealistic class sizes, unsupported student needs and the inability to disconnect from work have led to widespread burnout. **Supporting teacher well-being** through mental health resources, manageable workloads and policies that protect personal time is essential if we are to keep this next generation of teachers thriving within the profession.

5 EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS, GUIDANCE AND RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Teachers frequently report confusion about navigating their professional responsibilities, from understanding contracts to planning for retirement. The ATA is looking at this with the intention of creating **more accessible resources and opportunities** focused on practical guidance that will empower new teachers to confidently manage their careers.

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

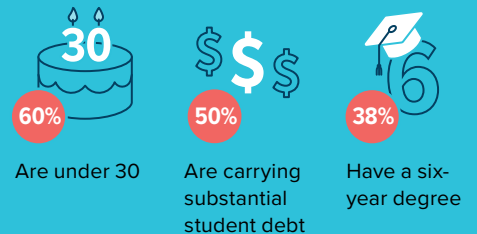
Helping early-career teachers feel effective in their work requires collective action. Schools, government bodies and the ATA must all work together to implement these strategies as informed by the research findings. Veteran teachers, most especially, have a crucial role to play as mentors and advocates, creating cultures of deep collaboration and responsive in-school support(s). Through a deliberate and coordinated effort, we can build a public education system where early-career teachers don't just survive to the end of the week or month but flourish throughout their careers to become mentors themselves one day. 

ATA research

The early years of practice

% of early-career teachers who ...

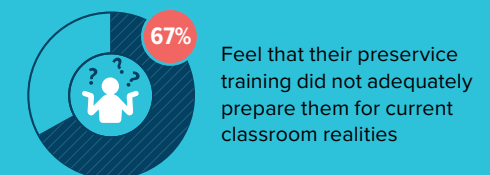
DEMOGRAPHICS



MENTORSHIP



PREPAREDNESS



INCLUSION



Reference

Gunn, T. 2024. "Engaging Preservice and Early-Career Alberta Teachers." Keynote address, Fall Planning Meeting of the Alberta Teachers' Association, Kananaskis, Alta., September 12.

Toward youth crime prevention

YouthLink program fosters engagement, retention of learning

Christina White Prosser

Adjunct Assistant Professor and Post Doctoral Scholar, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary

Adriana Dewar

Graduate Research Assistant, University of Calgary

Christy Thomas

Associate Dean and Associate Professor, School of Education, Ambrose University

Barbara Brown

Associate Professor and Associate Dean, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary

“**Make right choices and pick right people in life, don't take drugs, and have healthy relationships in life.**”

—Student survey respondent

EARLY INTERVENTION and educational crime-prevention programs are recognized as effective forms of prevention for reducing crime (Winterdyk 2013), particularly among individuals with a higher risk (Welsh and Farrington 2012). School-based intervention programs focus on educating youth about crime and its consequences before it occurs, which is preventative rather than reactionary (Clarke 1980). One program that targets school-aged youth is the Calgary Police Interpretive Centre (museum) YouthLink program that focuses on crime prevention by empowering youth to make positive life choices, with an aim of helping youth avoid crime and the risk of being victimized. This crime-prevention program offers a unique, engaging and interactive experience for students and teachers at the museum. This article highlights the findings of a study that was developed through a research partnership between the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary and the YouthLink board of directors to explore the impact of the local crime-prevention programming on school-aged youth.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This study used a mixed-methods approach to explore the impacts of YouthLink's one-day and week-long crime prevention programming on youth. The research project was guided by the following overarching question: What is the impact of the YouthLink crime prevention and youth education program (e.g., environment, museum space, artefacts)?

Two teachers from the one-day program and one teacher from the week-long program consented to participate in the study. Students in their classes were invited to participate in the study, and 29 students between grades 6 and 8 agreed to participate, with their parents also providing consent. Of these participants, there were 16 students from the one-day program and 13 students from the week-long program.

Two surveys were administered to the participants once they completed their visit to YouthLink. The first survey was administered two days following the visit, and the second survey was administered three months later. The intention of the surveys was to examine students' and teachers' immediate and short-term (three-month) recollections of their learning and perspectives about the YouthLink program.



CALGARY POLICE INTERPRETIVE CENTRE PHOTO ADAPTED

continued on page 37



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continued from page 34

RESULTS: MEMORABLE ACTIVITIES AND AREAS OF THE MUSEUM

In the first survey, 90.63 per cent of students found hearing first-hand stories from a police officer at the museum was helpful, and 84.38 per cent of students found watching real-life video footage helpful for their learning. In the second survey three months later, 100 per cent of students recalled watching the videos as helpful, and 93.75 per cent of students found hearing from a police officer and doing hands-on activities helpful. Overall, in both surveys, the majority of students found activities such as hearing first-hand stories from police officers and watching real-life video footage helped them learn about crime prevention and make safe decisions.

Students also identified the areas at the museum that they found memorable. Students found the areas about gangs and drugs as most memorable. In the first survey, students selected the Gangs area (68.75 per cent), Drugs area (59.38 per cent) and Healthy Relationships (53.13 per cent) area as very memorable. In the second survey, the Drugs (59.26 per cent) and Gangs areas (53.26 per cent) remained in the very memorable category.

MEMORABLE LEARNING

Even after three months, students recalled key messages they had learned when attending the YouthLink program, such as “think about it really hard before you do it” and “stop and think of what this could do to me.” Student participants commented on the importance of thinking and reflecting before taking action and of considering the consequences of their decisions. The following excerpt from one of the students in the open-ended questions in the survey helps illustrate how one student expressed their learning: “Make right choices and pick right people in life, don’t take drugs, and have healthy relationships in life.”

In the survey comments, students also reflected what they learned in the Online Safety area and noted how this experience increased their attention to data safety. One of the students shared, “one of the

officers [taught] us about how people use Wi-Fi so they can hack into people’s cell phones, computers and stuff, so I’ve been more careful about that stuff.”

The survey respondents also provided written comments to share more detail about their learning in the Gangs and Drugs areas of the museum. The following excerpts are examples of a few of the comments shared by students:

- “When you’re in a gang you’re probably gonna get shot down by other gangs, if u wanna live don’t be in a gang.”
- “I learned that most gangs hire young people, then they die early.”
- “I learned about all the bad drugs, and how gangs convince you that you are their friends, and how to be safe.”

Participants discussed how listening to a police officer’s investigative stories provided them with knowledge and awareness about these topics that helped them remember what they learned. For example, in the second survey, students reported that stories helped them gain awareness and understand how gangs recruit and how they could protect themselves from unhealthy relationships.


Overall, the survey results showed that students reported a high level of engagement while attending the YouthLink field trip. Teachers also shared in their survey responses how conversations about the museum experience have continued in the classroom even three months after the field trip. Students were particularly engaged by authentic, investigative and interactive learning experiences at the museum. Storytelling by police officers and real video footage were approaches that made the learning experience memorable and helped them learn about making safe decisions.

DISCUSSION

The results from this study revealed pedagogical approaches used in the different areas of the museum that helped students learn by keeping them engaged when visiting YouthLink and supported their recollections of learning after three months. Authentic learning experiences such as storytelling, hearing from police officers, first-hand stories through real video

footage, and interactive and investigative activities proved particularly beneficial. The study also found that students retained what they had learned after attending the program. They recalled the messaging or strategies learned, such as thinking before making decisions. Teachers reported that students continued to talk about their experiences and make connections three months after attending the program, indicating some level of retention and continued engagement with the topics. Overall, the results highlight some of the impacts of attending the YouthLink program and how this type of program can contribute to crime prevention and youth education.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to explore the short-term impacts of the YouthLink crime-prevention program. Students attending YouthLink found authentic experiences at the museum helped them retain what they had learned about making safe decisions. The results from this study hold value for those seeking effective early-intervention and crime-prevention strategies and school-based program approaches. Additional studies would be beneficial to explore the long-term impacts of such programs and to continue developing effective approaches to early crime prevention. 

References

- Clarke, R. V. G. 1980. “Situational’ Crime Prevention: Theory and Practice.” *British Journal of Criminology* 20 (2): 136–147.
- Welsh, Brandon C., and David P. Farrington. 2012. “Crime Prevention and Public Policy.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Crime Prevention*, edited by David P. Farrington and Brandon C. Welsh. Oxford University Press: 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195398823.013.0001>.
- Winterdyk, John. 2013. “Introduction to the Special Issue on Crime Prevention Within the Alberta Context.” *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 4 (1): 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs41201311814>.

Check it out!

These resources are now available through the ATA library.

Have you ever used your ATA library? If not, you should give it a try. Books, DVDs, robots and more delivered right to your doorstep with return postage paid by us. Great teaching resources are waiting for you. Contact us at library@ata.ab.ca.

1. *La médiation d'éléments de culture à l'école*

Cet ouvrage vise à soutenir les enseignantes et les enseignants dans l'intégration, de manière rigoureuse et stimulante, d'une approche culturelle à leur enseignement. Agrémenté d'activités et de guides de discussion.

2. *Powerful Ideas of Science and How to Teach Them*

There are so many cool ideas that science can explain, but science curricula never seem to mention them. Author Jasper Green will inspire you to look at science with fresh eyes and consider new ways to engage your students in the exciting world of science.

3. *Teaching Reading Across the Day, Grades K-8: Methods and Structures for Engaging, Explicit Instruction*

Literacy expert Jennifer Serravallo is back with a new book featuring nine lesson structures that focus on content. She includes many resources for teaching science, social studies and language arts in this new way.

4. *Cultivating Mathematical Hearts: Culturally Responsive Mathematics Teaching in Elementary Classrooms*

This excellent book can help you transform your students' math experiences. The suggested activities will provoke powerful discussions for students, and the useful planning tool supports your instructional design.

5. *Fail-Safe Strategies for Science and Literacy: Classroom Activities to Engage Students in Thinking, Exploring, and Making Sense of the World*

The ready-to-use activities in this book connect science and language arts by linking literacy strategies to learning key science concepts.



Your colleagues recommend

Teachers suggested these reads via Facebook.

Lori Karoly Szmul

Just finished *The Housemaid is Watching* this weekend. Freida McFadden never disappoints.

Maggie Day

And Then...Boom! by Lisa Fipps. A gripping new novel in verse featuring a poverty-stricken boy who bravely rides out all the storms life keeps throwing at him.

K Ellert Garber

I'm on my third book by Siddhartha Mukherjee (*The Song of the Cell*). I love his writing. I always learn much and gain a deeper understanding when I read this author.

Christy Haggarty

At a Loss For Words: Conversation in the Age of Rage by Carol Off. So helpful in breaking down the politicization and evolution of words.

6. *Le primaire en plein air*

Ce livre est un guide étape par étape pour se lancer dans l'aventure de l'éducation en plein air. On y trouve cent idées d'activités pour enseigner dans la cour de récréation, dans un parc ou dans la forêt.

7. *Beginners' Guide to Reading Schematics*

Electronics teachers will love this guide that contains useful explanations about the symbols on schematic drawings.

8. *Hacking Group Work: 11 Ways to Build Student Engagement, Accountability, and Cooperation with Collaborative Teams*

In this book, teachers will find practical ideas for making group work in the classroom work for everyone. They will learn ways to support introverts, support productive listening and effectively manage multiple groups at different levels.

9. *Picoh*

This set of two talking robot heads can be programmed in three different systems: Blockly, Scratch and Python.

Information provided by
ATA librarian
Sandra
Anderson



PHOTO BY MICHAEL PARILLAS

Brenda Parker

Little Princes by Conor Grennan. It's a true story of Conor's journey to Nepal to do some volunteer work for three months in an orphanage. What he finds in the orphanages sparks his life odyssey to help the children of Nepal and return them to their families. There is hair-raising adventure, romance, and an amazing story of one young man's determination to make a difference. It's along the lines of *Three Cups of Tea*, but in my opinion, a much more riveting story!

Melissa Rowbotham

I'd recommend *Hello Beautiful* by Ann Napolitano because it's a beautifully written story that explores themes of family, resilience and personal growth. The characters face challenges that reveal different perspectives on relationships and empathy, which can resonate with educators and inspire them to build deeper connections with students and colleagues. It also sheds light on how people carry and overcome personal struggles, which is valuable in understanding students' diverse backgrounds.

What's your favourite book by a Canadian author to use for class discussions?



The Big Green Book of Munsch Books

His books are a great way to teach intonation, emphasis and dialogue.

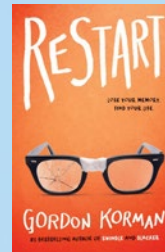
Sinead Dullaghan



What's My Superpower?

This book by Inuk author Aviaq Johnston is about finding your unique skills and abilities.

Adrienne Biever



Restart

This book by Gordon Korman explores themes of identity and changing self-conception.

Joshua Lafleur



If I Go Missing

This graphic novel by Brianna Jonnie and Nahanni Shingoose is a powerful presentation of the fears many Indigenous women have in today's society. Its poignant and heart-breaking story opens the door to classroom discussions on multiple issues.

Mary Claire Belanger



Les bas du pensionnat

This book by Christy Jordan-Fenton explains the assimilation that students went through in residential schools.

Mélanie Côté



Life of Pi

Beautiful, skilled writing.

Jennifer Prestash



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Term: Year-round

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Emergency Travel Coverage	A+	<p>ARTA travel coverage is unique and does not include a termination age or stability clauses for pre-existing conditions.</p> <p>BONUS GOLD STAR ★: Trip Cancellation and Interruption Insurance with \$10,000 per covered person per trip.</p>
Plan Diversity	A+	<p>ARTA Benefit Plans allow you to choose from ten different plan options for extended health care, allowing you to access a level of coverage that best suits your unique goals leading to and following retirement.</p>
Dental Care	A+	<p>Options with preventative, major restorative, and orthodontic coverage available.</p>

COMMENTS

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C: Average **D:** Needs Improvement

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A photograph of a man in a grey suit and glasses standing on a stage, giving a thumbs-up to a large, cheering audience in a theater. The background is dark, with the audience's lights visible. The stage floor is light-colored wood.

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Artists, programs, and dates subject to change.

Representing members with workplace health and safety concerns

HOW DOES OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY (OHS) apply to teaching? Alberta's OHS legislation is in place to promote and maintain the highest degree of physical, psychological and social well-being of workers; to prevent work site incidents, injuries, illnesses and diseases; to protect workers from factors and conditions adverse to their health and safety; and to ensure workers' rights in relation to work site health and safety.

Like any other worker in Alberta, teachers and school leaders have a right to a safe work environment.

What are my OHS rights and responsibilities as a teacher or school leader?

RIGHTS

Under OHS legislation, teachers and school leaders have the right to

- **know** of potential hazards and have access to basic health and safety information in the workplace;
- **participate** in health and safety discussions, on health and safety committees, in the development of hazard assessments, in the monitoring of controls mentioned in hazard assessments and in the reporting of safety concerns; and
- **refuse** work or to do particular work at a work site if they believe, on reasonable grounds, that there is an undue hazard at the work site or that the work constitutes an undue hazard to the health and safety of the workers

or another person (if in exercising this right, there is a specific process to follow).

RESPONSIBILITIES

Under OHS, teachers are considered workers and school leaders are considered supervisors. Both groups have an obligation to comply with OHS legislation and to report any OHS concerns.

Teachers' obligations also include protecting the health and safety of themselves and others at the worksite, and cooperating with their principal and employer in matters related to OHS. School leader responsibilities include ensuring that they are competent and familiar with relevant OHS legislation to properly supervise workers.

What is the role of the ATA in relation to OHS?

As the ATA is not a party to OHS legislation, the ATA's role is to represent members in the same manner as with all employment matters.

What if I have an OHS concern?

Call the ATA at 1-800-232-7208.

Specific requirements and timelines to report a workplace injury are often in place, so contact the ATA as soon as possible. ^{ATA}

Check out the full the OHS legislation:



alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code

WHAT IS A WORKPLACE HAZARD?

Any situation, condition or thing that may be dangerous to health and safety.

It is important to note that violence and harassment are considered workplace hazards for the purposes of OHS, and all employers are required to have policies and procedures in place to prevent violence and harassment, and to address allegations of harassment.



Représenter les membres ayant des préoccupations en matière de santé et sécurité au travail

COMMENT LA SANTÉ ET LA SÉCURITÉ AU TRAVAIL (SST)

s'appliquent-elles au milieu de l'enseignement? La législation albertaine en matière de SST vise à promouvoir et à maintenir le plus haut degré de bien-être physique, psychologique et social des travailleurs; à prévenir les incidents, les blessures, les maladies et les affections sur les lieux de travail; à protéger les travailleurs contre les facteurs et conditions mettant en danger leur santé et leur sécurité; et à garantir les droits des travailleurs en matière de santé et de sécurité sur les lieux de travail.

Les enseignants et les leaders scolaires ont droit, comme tout autre travailleur en Alberta, à un environnement de travail sécuritaire.

Quels sont mes droits et responsabilités en matière de SST en tant qu'enseignant ou leader scolaire?

DROITS

En vertu de la législation en matière de SST, les enseignants et les leaders scolaires ont le droit de :

- **savoir** quels sont les dangers potentiels et d'avoir accès aux renseignements de base sur la santé et la sécurité sur le lieu de travail;
- **participer** aux discussions sur la SST, aux comités de SST, à l'élaboration des processus d'évaluation des dangers, au suivi des mesures de contrôle mentionnées dans les processus d'évaluation des dangers et au signalement des préoccupations en matière de sécurité;

- **refuser** de travailler ou d'effectuer un travail particulier sur un lieu de travail s'ils ont des motifs raisonnables de croire qu'il existe un danger excessif sur le lieu de travail ou que le travail représente un danger excessif pour la santé et la sécurité des travailleurs ou d'une autre personne (s'il y a un processus déterminé à suivre pour exercer ce droit).

RESPONSABILITÉS

Dans le contexte de la SST, les enseignants sont considérés comme des travailleurs et les leaders scolaires, comme des superviseurs. Les deux groupes ont l'obligation de se conformer aux dispositions législatives en matière de SST et de signaler toute préoccupation en matière de SST.


Les enseignants ont aussi l'obligation de protéger leur santé et leur sécurité ainsi que celles des autres personnes sur le lieu de travail et de coopérer avec leur direction d'école et leur employeur sur les questions de SST. Les responsabilités des leaders scolaires comprennent notamment de s'assurer d'être compétents en matière de SST et de connaître la législation pertinente à ce sujet pour être en mesure de superviser correctement les travailleurs.

Quel est le rôle de l'ATA en ce qui a trait à la SST?

Puisque l'ATA n'est pas partie prenante de la législation en matière de SST, son rôle est de représenter les membres de la même manière qu'elle le ferait pour toute question d'emploi.

QUE FAIRE SI J'AI UNE PRÉOCCUPATION EN MATIÈRE DE SST?

Téléphonez à l'ATA au 1-800-232-7208.

Il existe souvent des exigences et des délais précis pour signaler une blessure au travail - contactez donc l'ATA dès que possible. 

Version complète des textes législatifs en matière de SST :



alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code

QU'EST-CE QU'UN DANGER EN MILIEU DE TRAVAIL?

Il s'agit d'une situation, d'une condition ou d'une chose qui peut être dangereuse pour la santé ou la sécurité.

Il est important de noter que la violence et le harcèlement sont considérés comme des dangers en milieu de travail au sens de la SST. Tous les employeurs sont tenus de mettre en place des politiques et procédures pour prévenir la violence et le harcèlement et pour donner suite aux allégations de harcèlement.



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~ linaatsii'swaawaakaasaakii (Pretty Spider Woman), Taylor Little Mustache (BA/BEd '19, MEd '23)

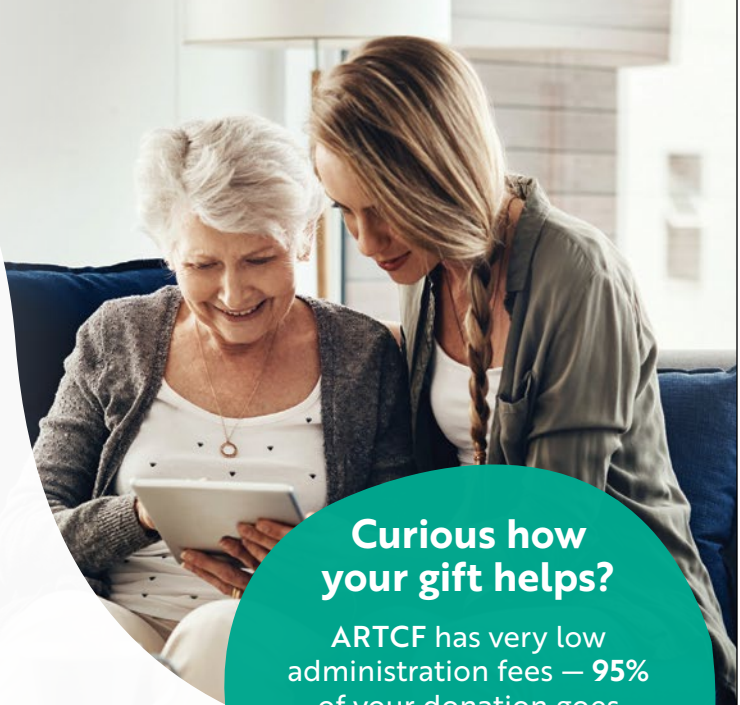
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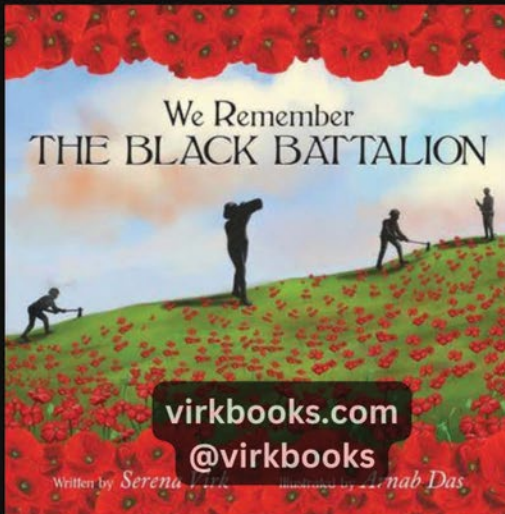
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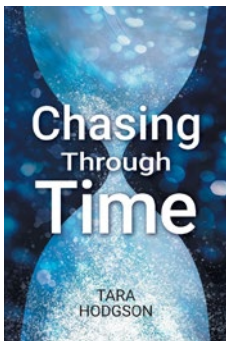


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Creative colleagues

Teachers have their own extracurricular activities. Some volunteer. Some write books. Others produce podcasts, create art or make music. Here are some endeavours undertaken by your colleagues “out there.”

BOOKS

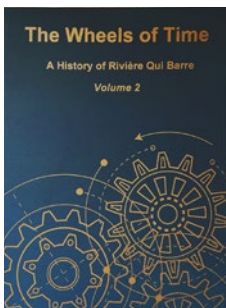


Chasing Through Time

When she is not teaching, Tara Hodgson is writing. Hodgson recently published her debut novel, *Chasing Through Time*. This young adult fiction explores the lived experiences of teenagers, now and in the past, and the impacts of social media on human connections.

TARA HODGSON

Camilla School, Riviere Qui Barre
www.tarahodgson.ca
 Instagram and Facebook @tarahodgsonauthor
 FriesenPress



The Wheels of Time: Volume 2

Teacher Monique Webb recently served on the Riviere Qui Barre (RQB) History Book Committee, which just published *The Wheels of Time: Volume 2*. For this new volume, Webb compiled stories shared by families from the RQB area. The book includes an updated historical perspective of the Métis of Alberta and Alexander First Nation, which was completed by Monique and Colette Arcand of Alexander. This book aims to preserve the history of the area,

which was previously captured in 1978 in *The Wheels of Time, A History of Riviere Qui Barre*.

MONIQUE WEBB

Greater St. Albert Catholic School Division, St. Albert
rqbalberta.com

MUSIC



The Garth Prince Band

Music teacher George Koufogiannakis plays with the African music ensemble “The Garth Prince Band” and won the 2022 Canadian JUNO Award for Children's Album of the Year with this ensemble. Koufogiannakis has also been performing for nearly 20 years as a guest guitarist with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra for pops concerts and special guest artists, in exclusive movie and Broadway music featured productions, and as a freelance musician across the country in a variety of folk and jazz ensembles.

GEORGE KOUFOGIANNAKIS

Austin O'Brien Catholic High School, Edmonton
 @geokmusic

VOLUNTEERING



OUTreach Southern Alberta

When not teaching high school or student teachers, Brent Saccucci works as an education consultant for OUTreach Southern Alberta Society. The Society uses an anti-oppressive and social justice framework to support and advocate for the LGBTQ2S+ communities of Lethbridge and surrounding areas. Saccucci

leads OUTreach's queer and trans inclusion workshops (Queer and Trans 101) for schools and workplaces around Lethbridge and Alberta.

BRENT SACCUCCI

Lethbridge Public School Division
learningwithbrent.com

► **What's new with you? Your colleagues want to know!**

If you'd like to make a submission for publication in *Who's Out There?*, email a summary (50–75 words) to associate editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn at lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.





I ♥ science & dogs

Teacher combines two loves to make a difference

Cory Hare

Managing Editor, *ATA Magazine*

THERE'S JUST SOMETHING ABOUT A DOG wearing glasses.

Throw in a lab coat and a science fact or two and you've got yourself the makings of a social media empire. At least that's how it turned out for Jason Zackowski.

Seven years ago, the Red Deer science teacher was marking chemistry assignments in his classroom at Lindsay Thurber school while his puppy Bunsen lounged nearby. Zackowski's mind lingered over the fact that, as a Bernese mountain dog, Bunsen is quite large. That led to a thought of putting a lab coat on the dog. Then came safety glasses, a cellphone photo and a social media post.

The post took off and Zackowski realized he'd tapped into a special recipe: people like science if it comes from a unique, engaging perspective. For the next two years, Zackowski provided such a perspective through a stream of tweets in the "voice" of Bunsen, who seemed equally as enthralled with science factoids as he was with moose legs and bacon.

"People bought into the make believe of it, that a dog was teaching them science. It was all very relatable," Zackowski says.

From that beginning, Zackowski has since built a popular "science dogs" brand whose mission is to "teach science through empathy and cuteness!"

THE PATH TO TEACHING

While growing up in Elnora, Alberta, Zackowski had a natural love for any science that crossed his path. This led him to pursue a bachelor's degree in science with the intention of advancing to a masters and becoming a research scientist, possibly in food sciences. However, during his third year of undergrad, Zackowski noticed something. He was more interested

in the climactic "learning moments" of science than he was in compiling and interpreting vast amounts of data — the backbone of scientific research.

"You've got to pick a career that you love and that wasn't something I loved," he says.

Although he knew he was not destined to be a research scientist, Zackowski completed his science degree, then drew on his experiences as a swim instructor and completed an education degree. It was a natural fit. He has been a high school science teacher for 19 years and still loves engaging students' natural love of science.

"I really like designing experiments that teach curricular objectives but also have a wow factor," he says.

SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

On the science dogs front, Zackowski gradually expanded the brand beyond his initial series of social media posts into a variety of content that now includes a podcast, a website, merchandise, activity books, a newsletter and subscriptions to texts from one or more of his pets.

The roster of pets has also expanded to include a golden retriever named Beaker, a cat named Ginger and a second Bernese mountain dog named Bernoulli.

The brand is now up to half a million followers on various social media platforms and, for Zackowski, being a content creator has become a side hustle that consumes almost all of his nonteaching time. His wife Kris, also a teacher, is heavily involved as well.

"We're a year or two away from having to make a hard decision about if I can stop teaching and just do that," he says. "We're not there yet, but that decision is coming, I think."



OFF THE LEASH WITH Jason Zackowski

As a science teacher, what is your favourite, go-to experiment?

Probably hydrogen gas balloons. I make the hydrogen gas chemically, trap it in a balloon, and then it's like the Hindenburg—when you light it on fire, the whole thing explodes. Nothing engages kids more than an explosion. You would need a really good quote from *The Grapes of Wrath* to rival a fireball.

To what do you attribute your love of animals?

I have always had trouble being in social situations as I sometimes suffer from social anxiety, and I found so much more comfort in hanging with a dog than with people. I respect and like my colleagues and friends, but truthfully, I would trade any social situation at any time to be with dogs. I love the quiet of them, and their expectation of you is just that you are kind.

Your wife Kris is also a teacher and is heavily involved in the science dogs empire. How does she contribute to the success of this endeavour?

Kris is my co-host on The Science Pawdcast, our live Pet Chat show, and runs our social media presence on Threads and Blue Sky. Now that we are writing books and organizing merchandise, there is no way I would have time to do things all by myself. She is a huge part of the organization behind what we do.

You're heavily into Comic-Con. Can you provide a brief summary of the places you've gone and the people you've met through this interest?

We have been all over Alberta and into Saskatchewan. My creative outlet is designing costumes for my family, and it has allowed us to do charity work and promo work for films. Memorable people we have met include James Gunn, Stan Lee, members of *The Kids in the Hall*, and most recently Emily Swallow who plays the Armorer in *The Mandalorian*.

► **Got an idea?** In Profile features an interesting teacher in each issue of the *ATA Magazine*. If you know of a teacher who would be a good profile subject, please contact managing editor Cory Hare at cory.hare@ata.ab.ca.

SHAPING THE FUTURE

The Zackowskis' weekly podcast, *The Science Pawdcast*, focuses on timely science news, dog science and an interview with a working scientist.

"We get to talk about their science, but I also ask them about their pets," Zackowski explains. "It really humanizes scientists. Scientists love their cats and their dogs and their fish just as much as anybody else who is a pet owner. I think that we need more of that with scientists ... aside from knowing an awful lot about one specific thing, they're exactly like everybody else."

Every Saturday, the Zackowskis record *Pet Chat*, a live spinoff of *The Science Pawdcast* that is billed as a community gathering for pet-related games and stories. The show's livestream attracts more than 2,000 followers from around the world.

In everything that the Zackowskis produce, a common thread is positivity and genuine affinity for science, animals and people.


"Being a joyful, educational thing on social media gives me a lot of fulfillment because social media can be this disgusting, dark, angry place," Zackowski says. "One of our fans said it best — they said we're a light on social media."


"We get messages from people from all over the world ... that our content is the reason that they got through a terrible situation or a hard time or depression," he says. "When we were smaller, we would get those occasionally ... but we're seeing that weekly now."


"I know that being a teacher matters and what I do shapes the future, but the joy and positivity of our social media presence matters too." ATA


HOW TO FIND THE SCIENCE DOGS

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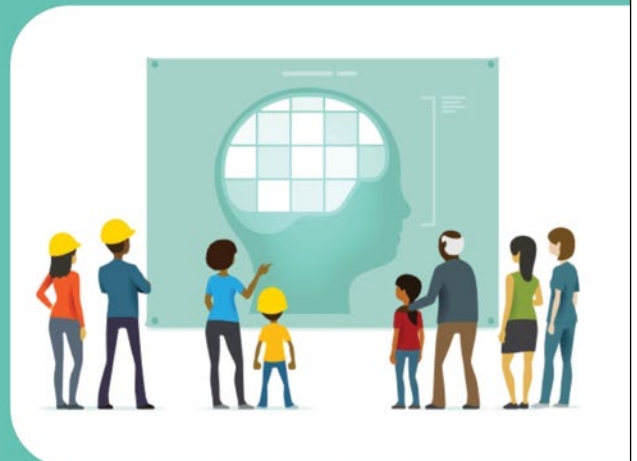
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To stay or to go?

What are your favourite go-to lunches for busy school days?

I make four or five jar salads on Sunday night. A few other teachers also make them. We trade salads throughout the week.

Meredith Wilkes

I swear by meal prepping every week. In my usual rotation are salads, stir-fries, casseroles or burritos! Up this week: spaghetti squash lasagna bake.

Eva Gorny

Boiled eggs, jerky sticks, assorted cheese slices, crackers, pickles and fruit. I prep this usually the night before or, if I am really on the ball, Sunday night.

Valerie Kossey-Fraser

Best hack for lunch: snack all day!

Rachel Jay

I often go for a snack bento box. I fill it with cucumbers, tomatoes, apple slices, yogurt, a protein bar, and some other odds and ends! Whatever I eat, I refill for the next day.

Kena Speers

Meal prep! I like pre-cut veggie sticks (carrots, celery, red pepper etc.) and pre-cooked chicken breasts (do not overcook!) Makes a nice healthy lunch, and you can pair it with some cheese, crackers and a piece of fruit. The chicken also goes well with salsa and rice, or you can make a quick wrap.

Kelley Quast

I usually eat leftovers, but sometimes it's a can of soup that I keep in my classroom for emergencies (a.k.a. when I forget my lunch)!

Katelyn K de Boer

As a substitute, I always keep nut-free bars handy as well as packaged Indian ready-to-eat food bags. This morning, I was called to come into teach kindergarten and had 45 minutes to get dressed and drive to the school. When I have time, I usually meal prep proteins and chop up a salad.

Simona Chalifoux

Leftovers for the win. And if I run out of leftovers one day, I have a stash of leftover leftovers in my freezer.

Jennifer Vermillion

A resealable bag of tortilla chips and some salsa.

Megan Herbert

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Let's get ridiculous

Advertising project taps into student creativity

Alyssa Bilodeau

Teacher, Grades 7–9, Humanities, Academy at King Edward School, Edmonton

A PROJECT THAT I ENJOY teaching each year is one I call the ridiculous products assignment. I have used this project for drama classes and Social Studies 9 (consumerism), but it could also be adapted for many other subjects, such as art or language arts, at several grade levels.

For this project, either on their own or in groups of two or three, students create a made-up product or invention out of readily available materials. The product does not have to move properly so it follows function, but it must have a purpose. I typically bring in assorted supplies like cups, cardboard, paint, pipe cleaners, tape, etc. and

invite students to bring any materials they would like to use to create their product.

Once students have created their product, they then create a visual advertisement on a poster or in a video to describe the product and sell it. Their advertisement must include the name of the product; an explanation or demonstration of what it does; the price; at least one category of advertising, such as the bandwagon effect, plain folks appeal, etc.; and at least two techniques of advertising, such as music/jingles, comedy, metaphor, etc.

During this project, students are able to showcase their creativity in new ways, and they always enjoy working with their hands to build a new invention and share it with their peers! A fun example was when students made an "aquarium on wheels" to take their pet fish for a walk!

This project assesses a wide variety of outcomes in various subjects. Additionally, if teachers are looking for an

assessment of listening/speaking outcomes, they could have students present their work and final advertisement to the class. ^{ATA}

“Students are able to showcase their creativity in new ways.”

► **Got an Idea?** Teacher Hacks is a place for colleagues to share their awesome ideas. If you have a hack that you'd like to share with your colleagues, please email a summary and photos to managing editor Cory Hare at cory.hare@ata.ab.ca.

Meet them where they are

A lesson in making assumptions

Amy Villneff

Staff Officer, ATA

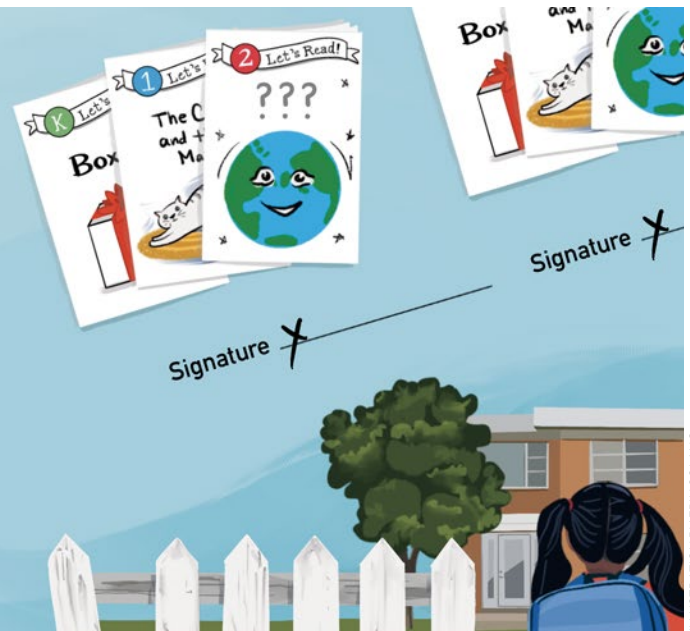


ILLUSTRATION BY ERIN SOLANO

THE CHALLENGE

Connecting with students when you don't know what they are going home to

AFTER EIGHT YEARS teaching junior high, I was assigned to teach Grade 3. I figured I knew plenty about teaching already and that switching to elementary would be a breeze, but I would soon realize that I had more to learn.

In September, I identified a student reading at the kindergarten level, so I implemented a home reading program where I'd send two early-reader books home each night for her to read with her parents' help. Each morning, she'd hand me the books and the sign-off sheet. As her reading improved, the books increased in difficulty. I was so pleased that she was making gains!

One morning, shortly after starting Grade 2-level books, the student returned with only one book signed off. I assumed her parents hadn't had time to get through both books, so I sent the book home again. The next day, she again returned with the book and the unsigned sheet. She still hadn't read the book.

I was concerned. This student had consistently

“ I would soon realize that I had more to learn.”


completed her nightly reading, and now suddenly she'd missed two in a row! I wondered what had caused the change. I thought perhaps one of her parents was unwell or something critical had happened. Finally, I asked, “Can you tell me why you haven't read this book yet?”

The student pointed to the title and said, “Mom and Dad couldn't read what that says. They said bring it back.”

I was shocked. I felt my stomach drop with the weight of shame. I'd assumed that all adults can read well enough to help their young children, but I suddenly realized that wasn't the case here. How difficult it must have been for her parents to send that book back twice!

I called the student's mom, thanked her and explained that helping at home had helped their child make great progress. I then explained a new approach. We'd have the student try the books at home first, then we'd work on them at school the next day.

After implementing this change, I would occasionally send a book home for the student to read to her parents so they could share in her joy.

This experience taught me that, as a teacher, I had to meet each student where they were, without assumptions, and with a whole-child approach. From that point on, that approach became paramount to my job as a teacher and helped me every day. 

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