

What is the Matter (with)(of) the Methods Course?

Deborah Loewenberg Ball

 @deborah_ball

2024 Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators
March 28, 2024 • Anaheim, CA



Three premises that underlie the argument of this talk

1. Teaching has tremendous power for advancing children's flourishing, disrupting racism, and building a more just society.
2. The work of teaching is poorly understood and too often goes unseen and undervalued.
3. Teacher education could be a potent force for harnessing that incredible power of teaching. **That is our unique Kuleana.**



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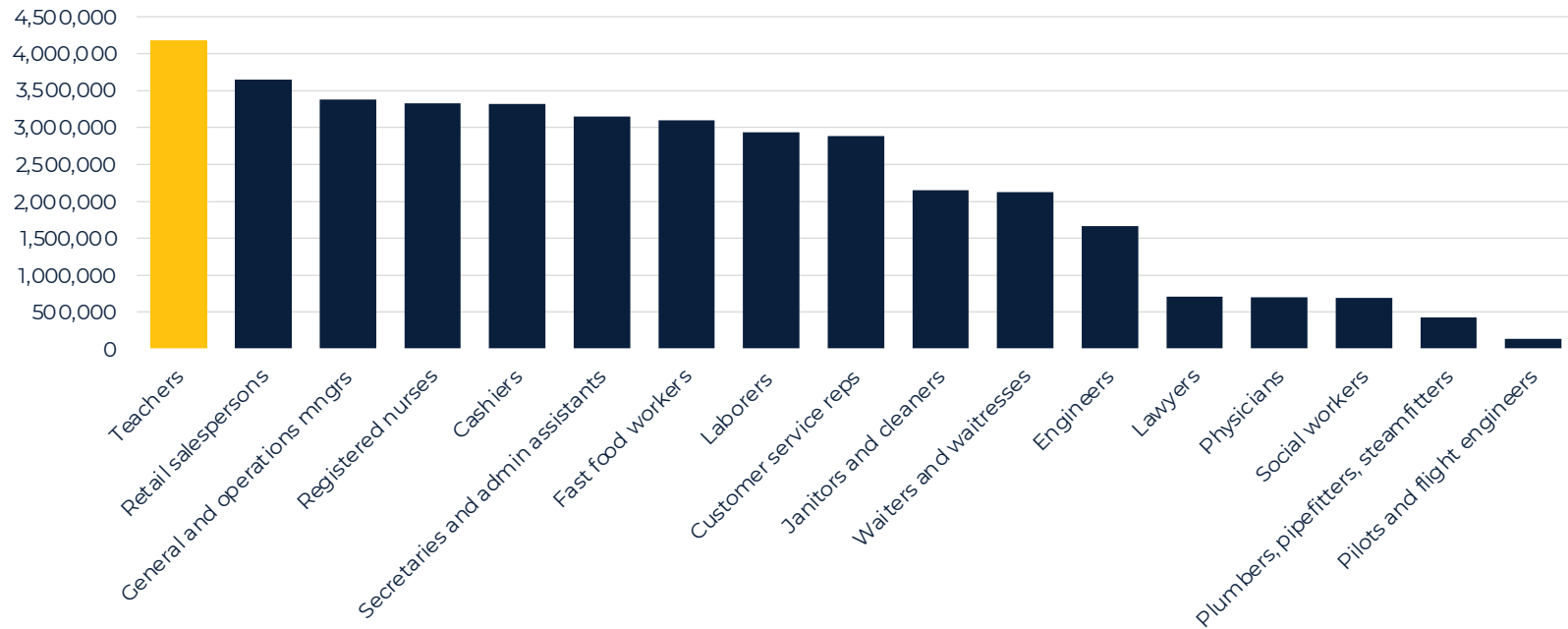
Teaching is powerful.



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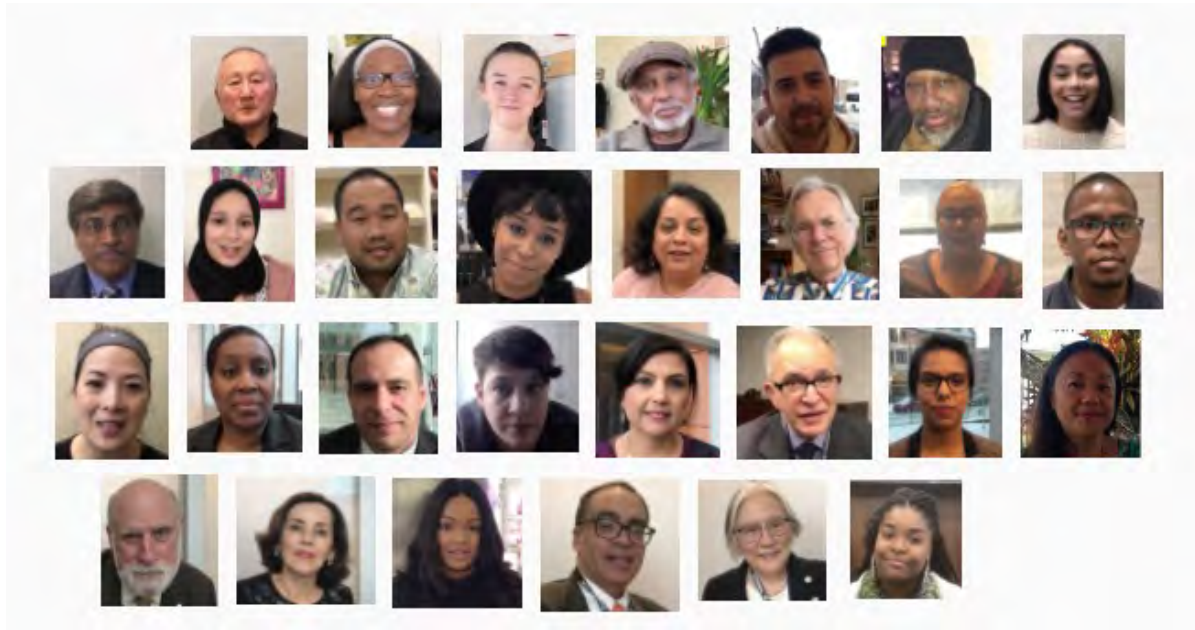
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The scale of the teaching profession

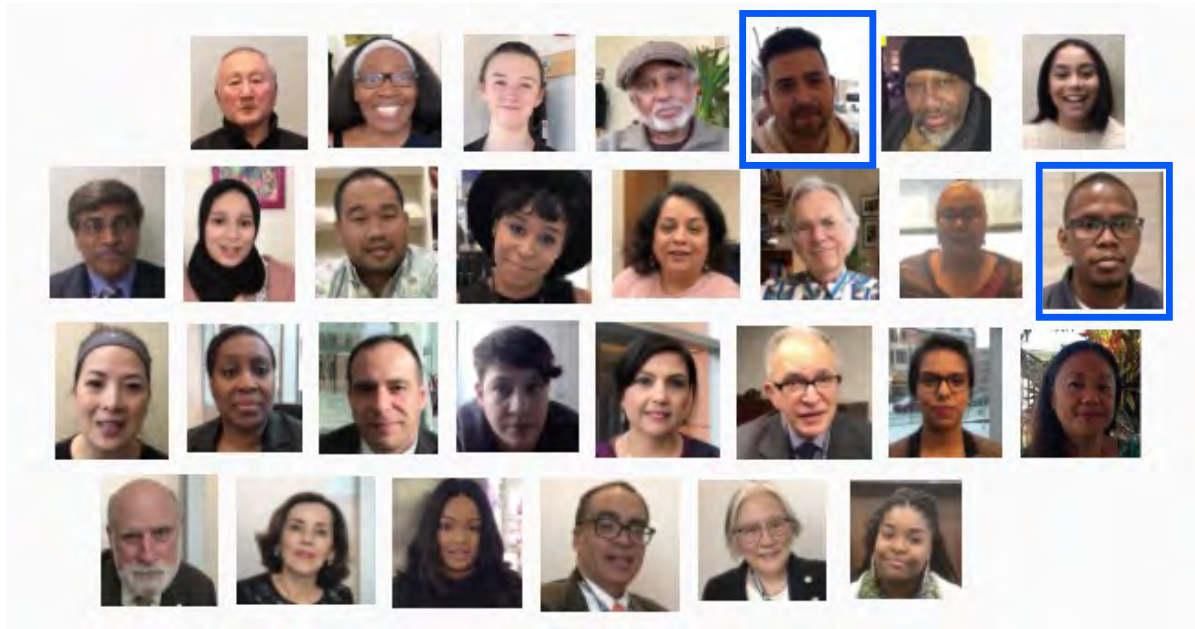


Is there a teacher who had a significant impact on you?





**What stands out to you?
What patterns do you notice?**



Codee

Brendan

**What stands out to you?
What patterns do you notice?**

Video: Brendan



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Video: Codee

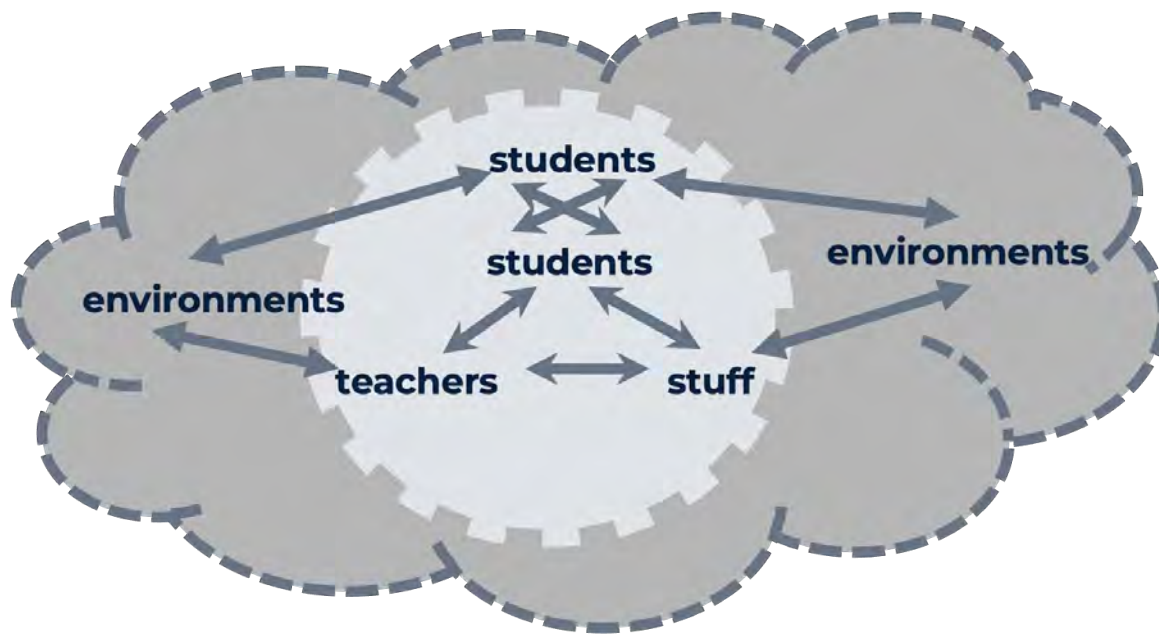


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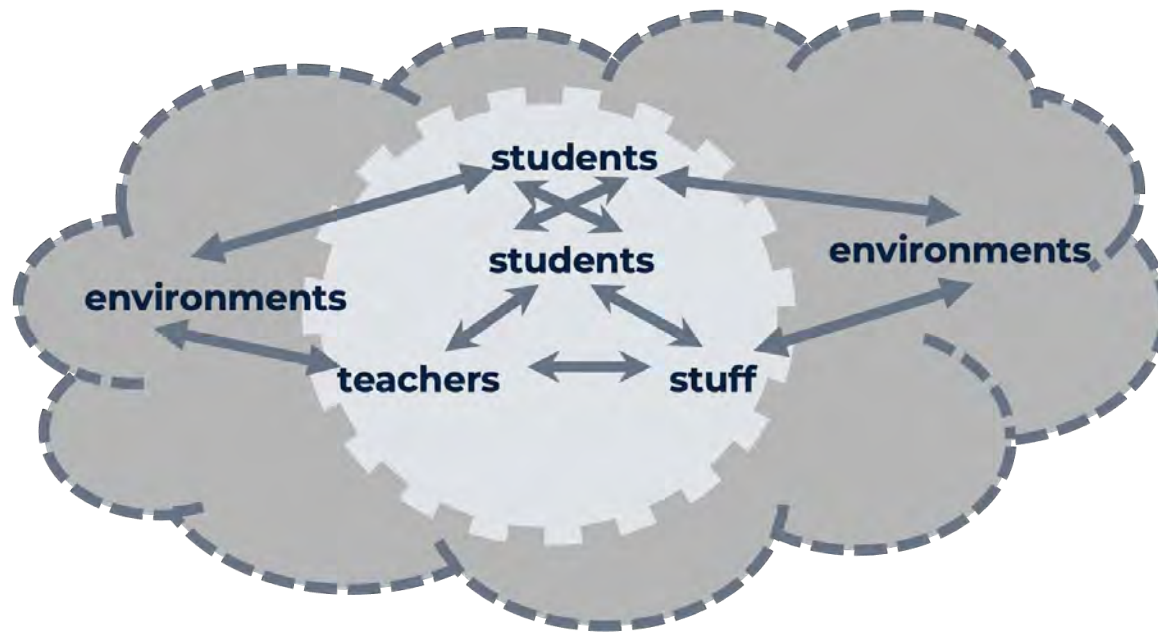


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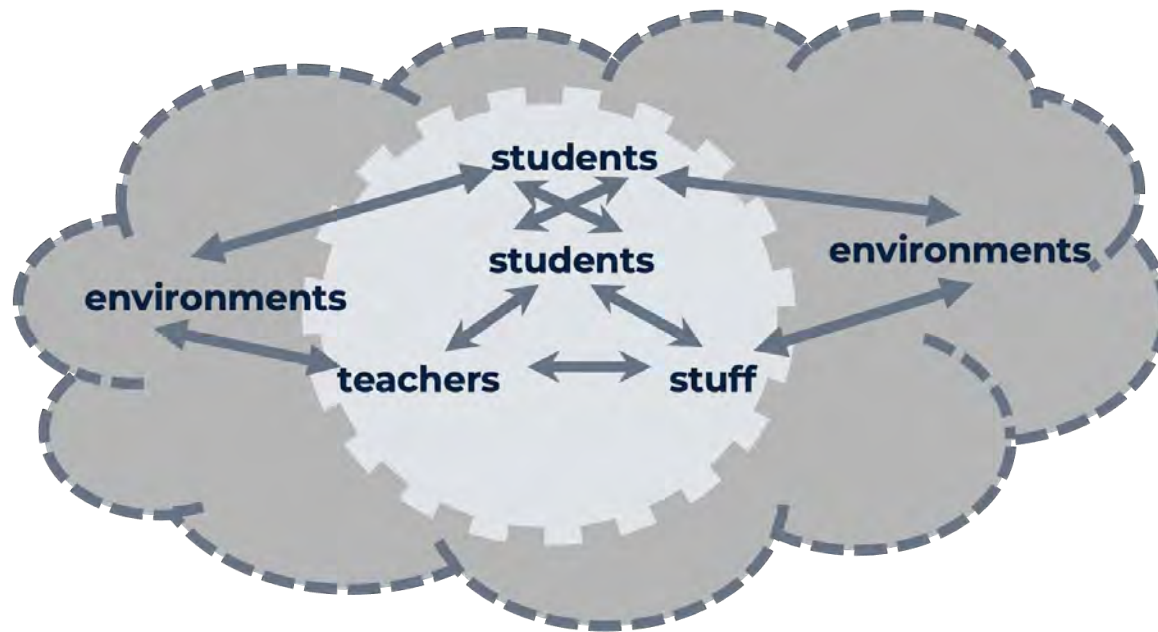
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1. Teaching and learning are constructed interactively and are interpretive.



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2. They take place within broad historical and socio-political environments.







NOTICE:
VOTERS ARE REQUIRED TO WEAR MASKS,
PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING,
AND BE MINDFUL OF THE OTHER PEOPLE
IN YOUR COMMUNITY.
6 FEET





What is our Kuleana as teacher educators?

To understand and lift up the power of teaching

To advocate for harnessing the power of teaching for good

To be accountable to the children and families of this diverse nation

Three premises that underlie the argument of this talk

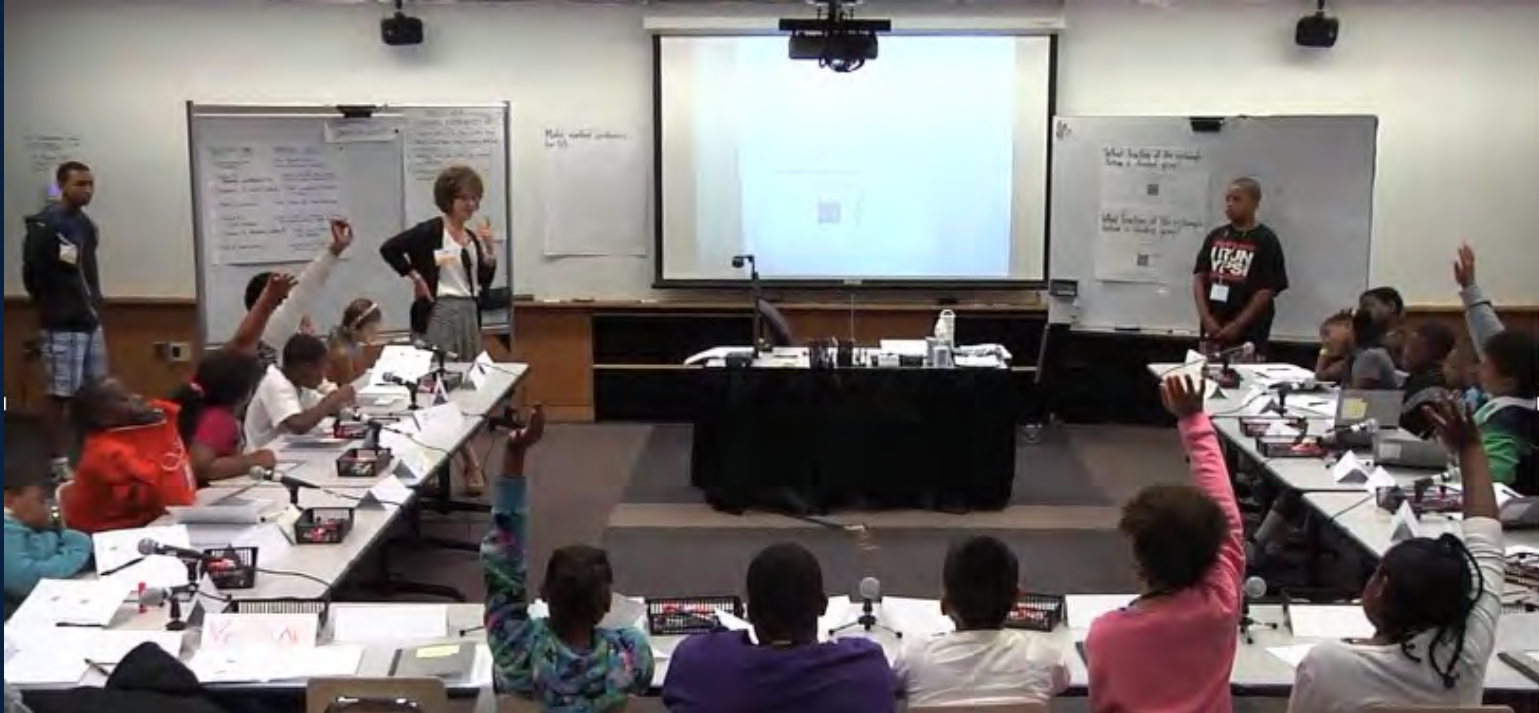
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We begin by looking
at some teaching
together.

Teaching intertwines moral, intellectual, political, social, and personal relational and communication work.



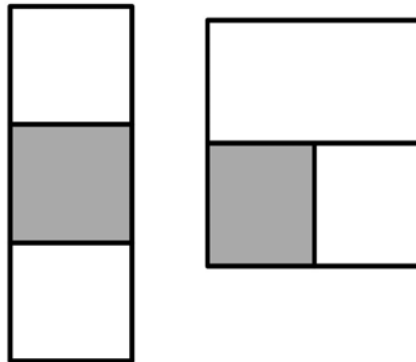
20



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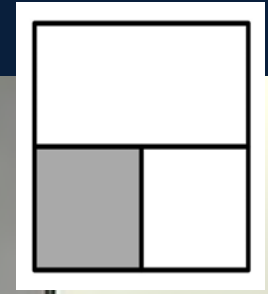
What fraction of each rectangle below is shaded gray?



What work of teaching do you see?



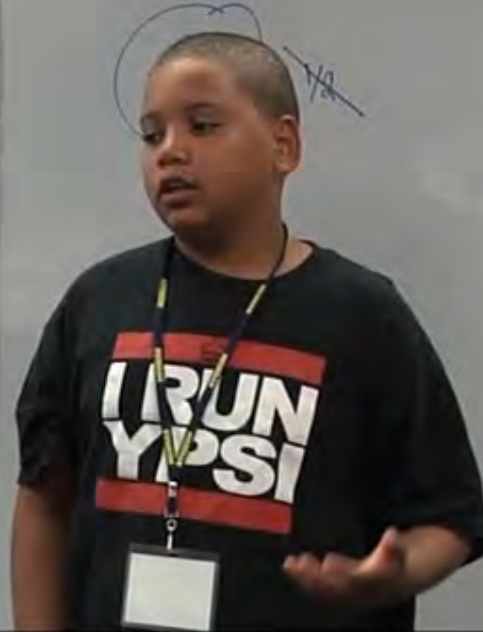
Video: Antar, Gabriella, and Gabi



What fraction of the rectangle below is shaded gray?



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Antar: I think it's not a fraction because all the parts are not equally the same.



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How is Antar, a Black male, being positioned?

What is the mathematical point of this?

What does Antar mean by "it's not a fraction"?

Should I put another example up or keep working on this figure?

Should Antar stay at the board while Gabi presents?

Shall we stay in whole group or turn and talk in smaller groups?

How shall I try to position Antar and Gabi, a Black boy and a Black girl, relative to each other?

What shall I say or ask next?

Should I explain or keep the children talking together?

Whom shall I call on?

Are those two students over on the side following this discussion?

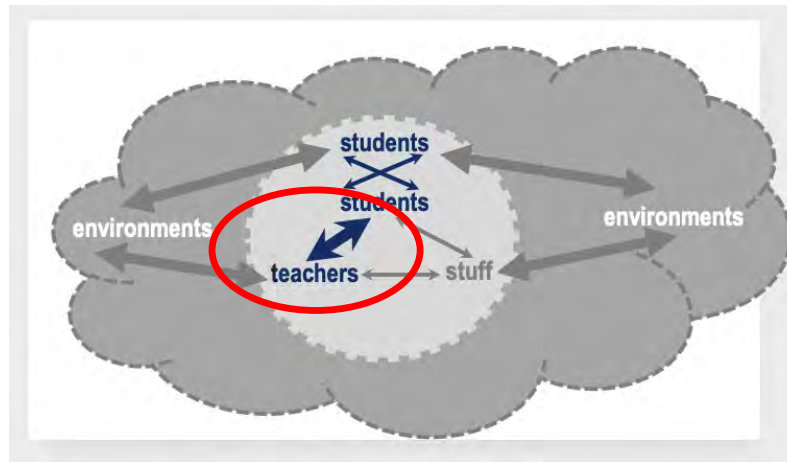
Where shall I stand?

How can I get other students to build on what Antar and Gabi have said?

Is this a good moment to give Gabi the "sticky" line?

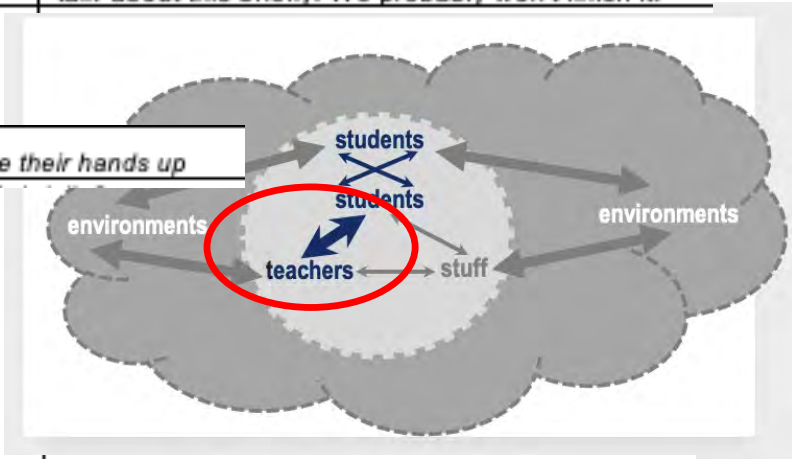
How is Antar feeling about his contribution?

Teacher	Who'd like to answer what you think about the second rectangle? We're only going to be able to talk about this briefly. We probably won't finish it.	Launch discussion
Teacher	Who'd like to explain what you think? Antar, what do you think?	Choose student to call on
Teacher	Could you come up to the board and explain? Thank you.	Frame task for student who is presenting
Teacher	I really like the way that people who are coming to the board are doing today. You are explaining really well.	Acknowledge competence
Teacher	Here's a marker. Can you explain your thinking?	Provide material support
Antar	I think it's not a fraction because all of the parts are not equally the same shape.	Listen
Teacher	Can you say that one more time to the class?	Support presenter
Antar	I think it's not a fraction because all the parts are not equally the same.	Listen
Teacher	Can someone repeat what Antar said? Very nice, Antar.	Orient students to presenter
	<i>Many students have their hands up</i>	
Teacher	What did he say? Gabriella?	Choose student to call on
Gabriella	Oh. He said that he doesn't think it's a fraction because not all the parts are equal.	Listen
Teacher	Is that what you said?	Position first student as authority
Teacher	Okay, would someone like to comment on that? Agree or disagree with him?	Orient students to one another
Teacher	Okay, let's see, how about Gabi.	Choose student to call on
Gabi	I disagree.	Listen
Teacher	What do you think?	Pose question
Gabi	I think the fraction is one-fourth.	Listen
Teacher	One-fourth? Do you want to come up and say why you think it's one fourth?	Frame next step, support next presenter
Teacher	Antar, do you want to stay there or do you want to sit down? Okay. Thank you very much. You did a good job of explaining your thinking.	Position student with agency, acknowledge competence
Teacher	So, let's hear what Gabi's thinking.	Orient students to one another
Gabi	I think it's one-fourth because, like he said, all the fractions aren't the same, but you can make them the same by dividing a line down the middle.	Listen
Teacher	Here's something you can use so if someone wants to take it off again, they can. Okay, so now explain what you've done. Talk to the class, okay?	Provide material support
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Teacher	And so then you decided?	Probe
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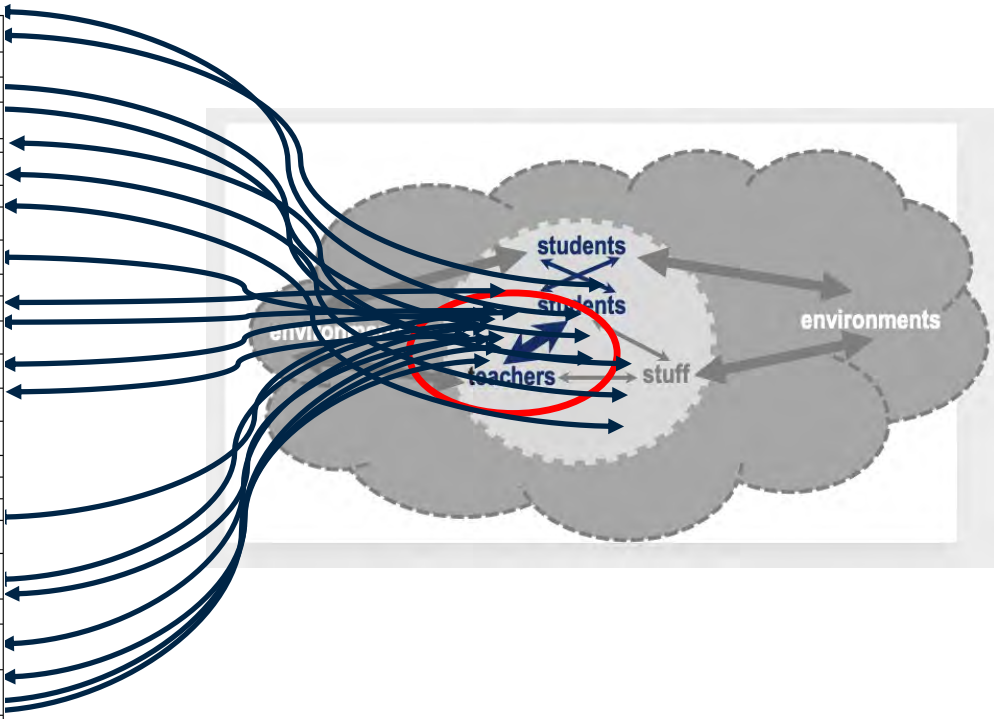


Many students have their hands up

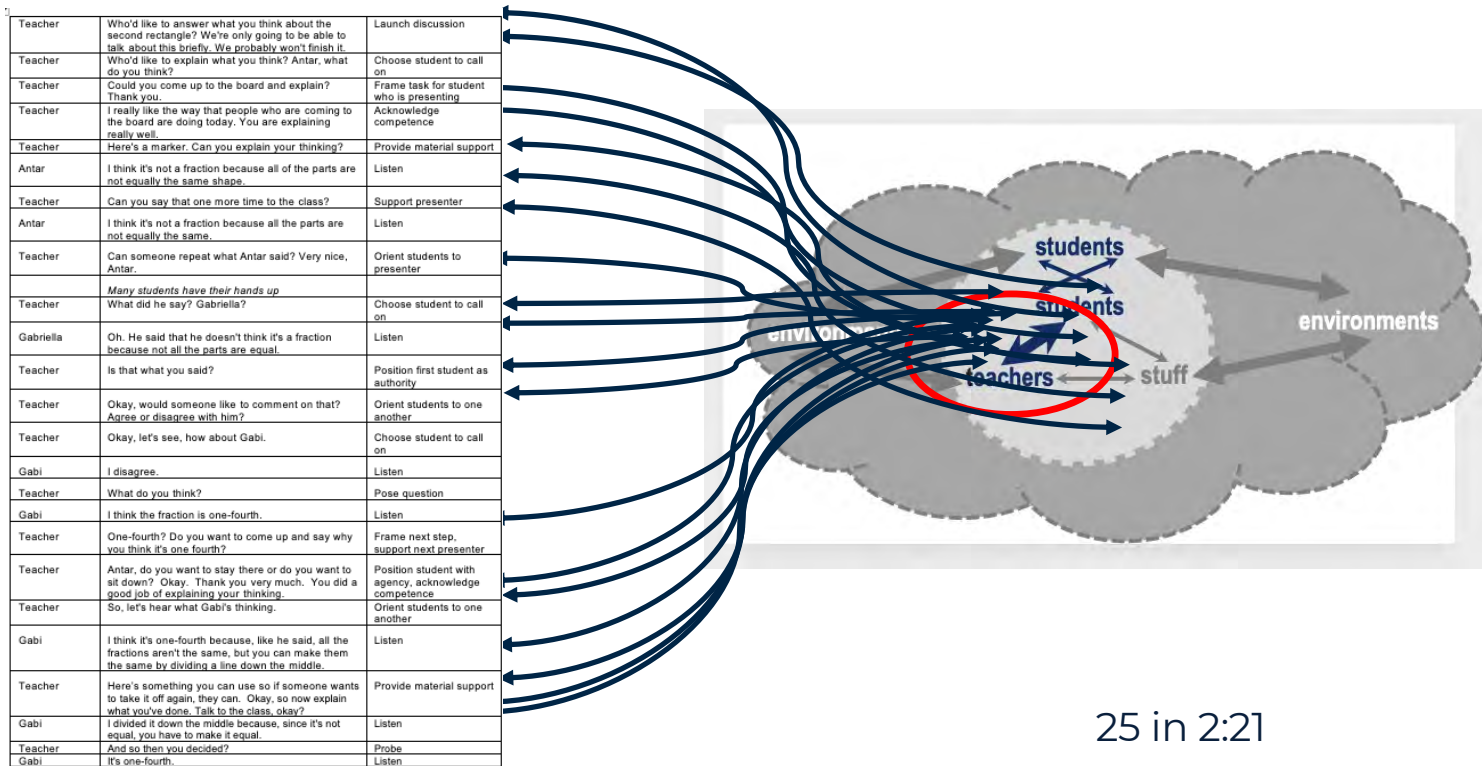
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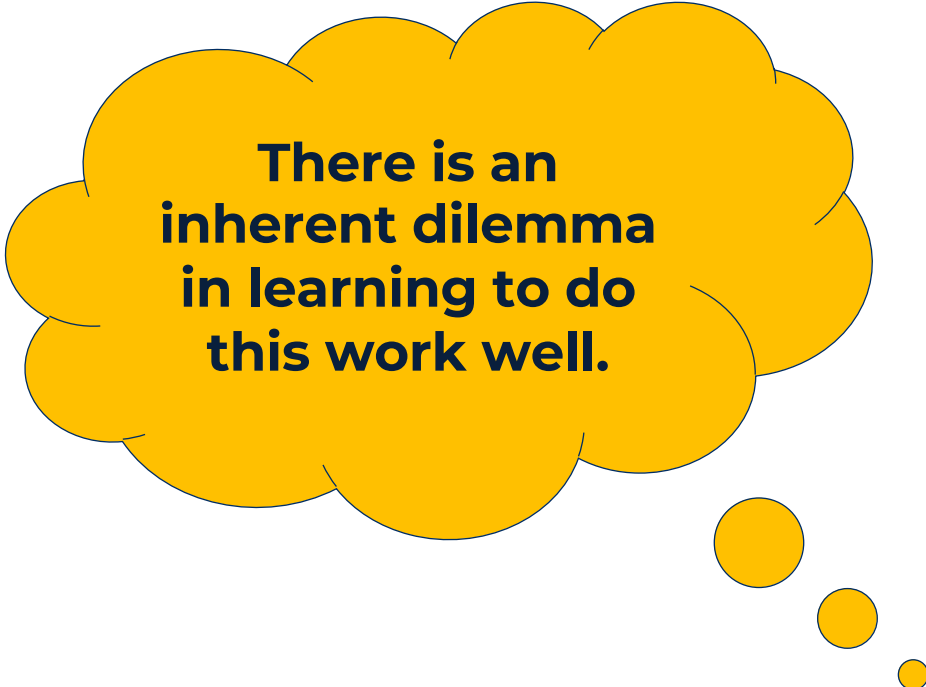
Teaching is dense with “discretionary spaces”



Discretionary spaces lie in the many, many moment-to-moment moves, uses of language, and decisions that are inevitable in practice.

They are both crucial resources for supporting young people, but also where harm happens.

1. **Teaching is powerful.** When it is done with care and judgment, students can thrive — learn content, develop positive identities, learn to value others and work collectively.
2. Teaching also involves **enormous discretion.**
3. How that discretion is exercised can either reinforce racialized and oppressive patterns of social, personal, and epistemic injustice and harm, or it can **disrupt these patterns.**



**There is an
inherent dilemma
in learning to do
this work well.**



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inherent dilemma
in learning to do
this work well.**

**Learning (anything)
builds on what
learners bring —
what they know,
assume, do, but . . .**

Teaching is structurally conservative

- Teachers have grown up in the schools and the society we have, not the ones we want. They have had a powerful “apprenticeship” of observation *and* experience. (Lortie, 1975)
- People choose to become teachers who were successful in these schools. They often take “the way things are” for granted and have developed habits of seeing and doing.



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What it means to do math

Views of who is smart and who struggles to learn

Who are troublemakers

How learning happens

What teachers should do and say

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That is our unique Kuleana.



Dilemmas of teacher education

- Time is short
- Relationships with schools and teachers are not simple
- Its inherent whiteness (in who the teacher educators and teacher candidates are, in the professional knowledge and research base)
- The segmenting of teaching into silos that distort the work
- The endemic problem of connecting theory, beliefs, and action



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The special opportunity of the “methods” course: A context for layering

Creating learning opportunities that allow novice teachers to practice using discretionary spaces through:


- Focusing on and practicing specific aspects of learning the work of teaching
- Building a repertoire of practices that break taken-for-granted habits and that disrupt patterns of injustice and oppression
- Knowing and using content knowledge for teaching



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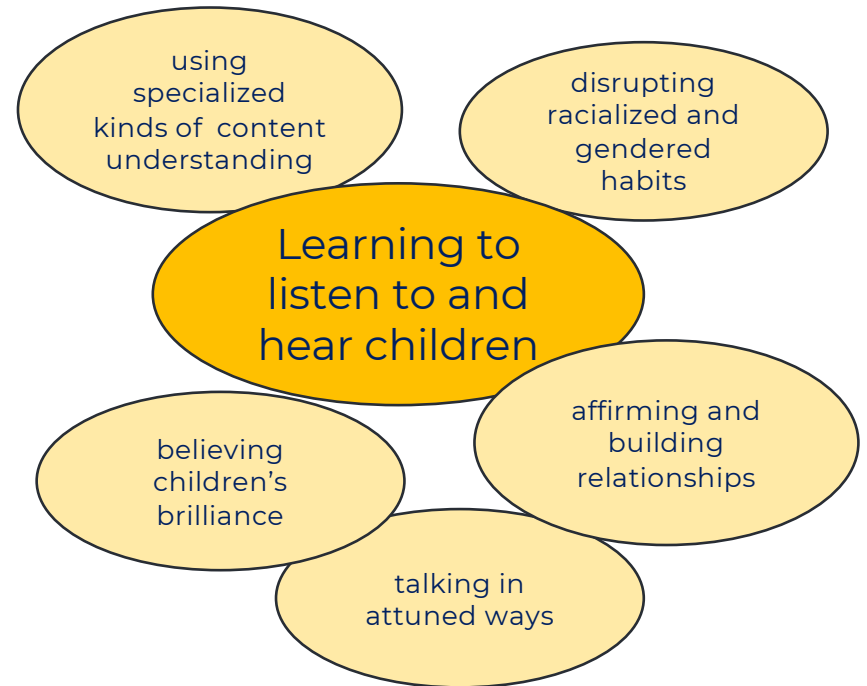


Learning to
listen to and
hear children

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The case of a layered opportunity for learning teaching

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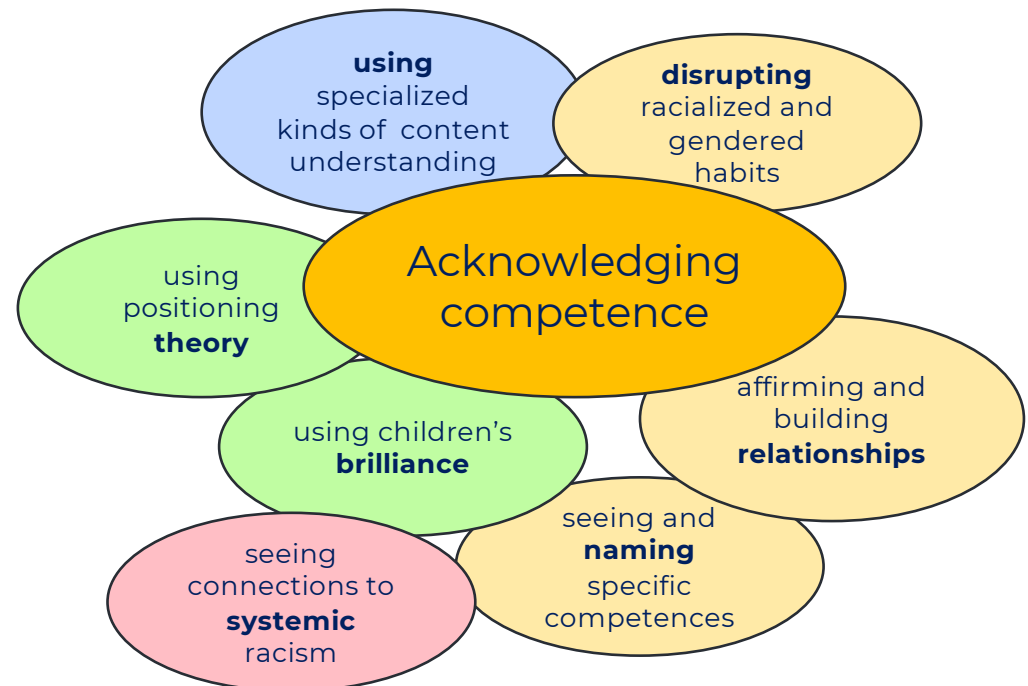
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“Positioning” theory

A theory from social psychology, originated by Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré

Focuses on how discursive and other moves in social interactions and situations set up how people are seen, interpreted, and how people experience and feel themselves to be seen interpreted, and how they experience their sense of self in that context.

Davies, B. & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *The Journal of Social Behavior*, 20(1) 43–63.



Acknowledging competence (case of mathematics)

Deliberately deploying the power of teaching to:

1. Broaden and label what being competent (“smart”) in mathematics means
2. Intervene to position who (and what) is seen as competent in mathematics
3. Support positive individual identities and self-positioning

Sources: E. Cohen and R. Lotan, complex instruction; J. Boaler’s work; *Smarter Together: Collaboration and Equity in the Elementary Mathematics Classroom* (Featherstone, Crespo, et al., 2011)

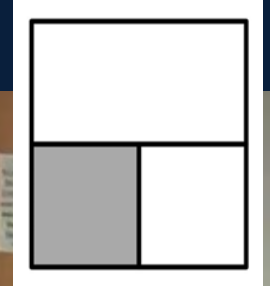


Practice

1. What competences would you acknowledge here?
2. Whom would you choose to acknowledge and why?
3. What would you actually say?



Video: Antar, Gabriella, Gabi, Virshawn, Marquis, and Kassie



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Acknowledging competence in this episode

Antar: “Antar contributed something very important here. He pointed out that the parts are not equal. Can someone say what was so important about this?”

Gabriella: “Gabriella, you were listening closely to Antar’s explanation. This is so important for learning and developing ideas in math.”

Gabi: “Gabi, you built on what Antar said. You showed a way to make the parts equal and name the fraction.”

Virshawn: “Virshawn, you were willing to say you weren’t ready to say what Gabi said. That is an important part of learning to pay attention to your own thinking.”

Marquis: “Marquis, you were keeping notes on what other people have contributed. Keeping records is really helpful for learning math. Do you want to show everyone what you have recorded in your notebook?”

Kassie: “Kassie, you were looking at the rectangle in a different way. That is really interesting and tomorrow you can show us what you are seeing and we can think how it is connected to the idea of naming the whole and equal parts in naming fractions.”

Breaking habits in acknowledging competence

- Orienting the comment to oneself (e.g., “you helped me see your thinking”) instead of to the class
- Thanking the student (e.g., “Thank you for sharing your idea”) instead of highlighting the mathematical value
- Still correcting something at the same time (e.g., “but remember that we are talking about the whole for this problem”) instead of authentically naming the mathematical contribution
- Saying “good job” instead of being specific about the mathematical idea or practice



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Upcoming programs at TeachingWorks
Registration available now
Learn more at teachingworks.org



View our upcoming programs calendar
teachingworks.org/events-calendar



1

May 20–24, 2024

Content Methods Laboratory Class and Workshop

Join teacher educators from around the country in person or virtually as we investigate the best ways to use the semester-long methods course.

Register by May 1, 2024



2

June 17–21, 2024 | Detroit, MI
June 24–28, 2024 | Grand Rapids, MI

Elementary Mathematics Laboratory

Explore the complexity of teaching and investigate and challenge what it means to use skillful teaching to disrupt patterns of injustice.

Register by May 30, 2024



3

August 1–2, 2024

Introduction to Practice-Based Teacher Education Workshop

This workshop enables teacher educators to develop approaches to making teaching practices explicit to beginning teachers and engaging them in supported practice during pre-service training.

Register by July 19, 2024



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THANK YOU!



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Image on slide 4:
“The class drawing and writing about the floating pumpkin.” by Flickr user lori05871
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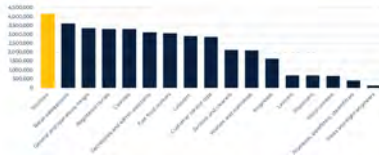


Image on slide 4:
Screenshot of video from "A Momentary Lapse or Abusive Teaching?" The New York Times.
Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/video/nyregion/100000004159212/success-academy-teacher-rip-and-redo-video.html>



Image on slide 4:
Photo from "Cause for Alarm: Addressing North Carolina Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion Rates," by Ebonyse Mead, MA, MS, CFLE and Kara Lehnhardt, MBA
Retrieved from <https://www.smartstart.org/cause-for-alarm-addressing-north-carolina-early-childhood-suspension-and-expulsion-rates/>

Credits



Data on slide 5:

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). May 2022 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates: United States.

Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#25-0000



Image on slides 14–16:

Photo from “Why You Need an Experienced Real Estate Agent” by Elizabeth Weintraub, the balance.

Retrieved from <https://www.thebalance.com/experienced-real-estate-agents-1798883>



Image on slides 14–16:

Photo from “Black doctors earn less than white peers, study reveals” by Stacy M. Brown, The Philadelphia Tribune.

Retrieved from https://www.phillytrib.com/lifestyle/health/black-doctors-earn-less-than-white-peers-study-reveals/article_2d359910-85c8-524b-b6d2-15d1705ad762.html

Credits



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Image on slides 14–16:
Photo from “Want to be a poll worker? Philly says it’s responding to ‘unprecedented’ number of applicants” by Ximena Conde, WHYY
Retrieved from <https://whyy.org/articles/want-to-be-a-poll-worker-philly-says-its-responding-to-unprecedented-number-of-applicants/>



Image on slides 14–16:
Photo from “Trump Rioters Storm U.S. Capitol (photos),” Variety
Retrieved from <https://variety.com/gallery/trump-rioters-storm-us-capitol-photos/congress-electoral-college-8/>

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Photo from “20 Classroom Interventions for Children with Anxiety Disorders” by Jerry Kennard, Ph.D., HealthCentral.

Retrieved from <https://www.healthcentral.com/article/20-classroom-interventions-for-children-with-anxiety-disorders>



Image on slide 16:

Photo from “10 Ways Well-Meaning White Teachers Bring Racism Into Our Schools” by Jamie Utt, *everyday feminism*.

Retrieved from <https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/08/10-ways-well-meaning-white-teachers-bring-racism-into-our-schools/>



Image on slide 38:

Photo from “Cake mix neapolitan layer cake” by Cookie Madness.

Retrieved from <https://www.cookie madness.net/2014/08/23/neapolitan-layer-cake/>

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