

DESIGNED FOR EMPOWERMENT: A Teacher's Transformation

Sarah Ann Steinhauer

BFA/BSEd

*Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Fine Art in Art & Technology in the Welch Center for
Graduate and Professional Studies of Goucher College*

April 27, 2021

Advisor Signature

I authorize Goucher College to lend this thesis, or reproductions of it, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

© 2021 By Sarah Ann Steinhauer

All rights reserved

Acknowledgements

I must first thank my partner, Benjamin Brautigam, for his unwavering support in my journey to finish my master's program and realize my identity and purpose as a designer. His patience and presence through this process have encouraged me to recognize the opportunities within the problem. Together, we are the creative solution.

I thank my children and stepchildren, Ari, Beatrix, Greyson, and Leighton for their understanding in any absences I have had while working through these degrees and thesis. The thing I look forward to the most is meeting the people you will continue to become.

I offer my sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor, Sue Eleuterio, for her incredible patience and guidance. This type of work is not one of my strongest competencies, and I always left our conversations feeling confident and inspired—an outcome that only a phenomenal teacher could influence.

Much appreciation to Andrew Bernstein, my graduate advisor, for his continued support as I took the long road in pursuit of these degrees. He has shown nothing but understanding and accommodation for the various obstacles I have encountered. You have truly made it possible for me to make this happen.

I thank Ryan Eagan, who volunteered his valuable time, energy, and talent to ideate, read, and edit this work. It means the world when someone meets me where I am and shows me where I can go, and you have done that time and time again.

Finally, I want to thank the *TeachUp* community, and the following members in particular:

Cheryl Burt, you are the reason I believed *TeachUp* needed to exist. Our conversations let me know I am not alone and show me just how far we can go together.

Abi Baiza, you are a force of nature who inspires me to “do the work” if I really want to make the change. You have brought drive, determination, and dedication to this space, and it has made all the difference.

Gloria Longo, our first conversation was the blueprint for *TeachUp*. Thank you for reaching out, and for always showing the kind of vulnerability and insight that makes our community exactly what it needs to be.

Nancy Shore, I am so grateful that we found one another. Your support for educators and your willingness to take part encourages the work to keep going. Our unexpected connection is one of the most meaningful I have ever made.

Ann Hamil, the wisdom, curiosity, and thoughtfulness you bring to the *TeachUp* space means so much to me personally because of the many things we have in common. I am so glad that you have chosen this community and look forward to continuing to grow together.

Tanya Sepela, you were planting the seeds of *TeachUp* before I even imagined it. Thank you for being there to help me get through the really hard parts, and always affirming that the things I thought made me too different were the things that would help me make a difference.

Abstract

An art educator finds herself in the throes of a professional crisis, a viral pandemic, and an identity revelation while working through the last stages of earning graduate degrees in Digital Arts and Art and Technology. Her thought processes as a teacher and a designer overlap as she seeks to find creative solutions to address these challenges. She uses a design-thinking approach to develop a virtual community of educators in order to find connection, support, agency, and ultimately a new meaning in the fields of education and design. Using personal narrative paired with excerpts from relevant sources, this is a work of reflection on a journey of rebuilding oneself while building something new.

Keywords

Design-thinking; human-centered design, user experience design, educator advocacy; educator agency; teacher support; trauma response; personal narrative; community building; virtual community; processing crisis; identity

Table of Contents

A Preface for Perspective	7
1 An Unexpected Exodus	8
2 A Redirected Response	10
3 A Call for Connection	12
4 A Designer's Dilemma	14
5 A Dialectical Disruption	16
6 An Overlooked Opportunity	18
7 A Search for Solidarity	21
8 An Affirmation to Actualize	23
9 An Appeal for Adoption	24
10 A Baseline Beginning	26
11 An Intentional Intimacy	28
12 A Conscious Composition	30
13 An Identity Epiphany	31
14 An Invitation to Ideate	33
15 A Collective Commencement	35
An Epilogue of Empowerment	37
References	39
Appendix	58

A Preface for Perspective

When I originally imagined writing my thesis at the end of my six-year journey to receive a dual Master's in Digital Art and Art and Technology, it looked like a traditional research paper. I would build a unique argument that connected my new skills in design-thinking with my professional passion, public education. What I did not expect, however, was a series of events that transformed the way I think about education, design, work, politics, humanity, and myself. Professional trauma, personal discovery about my health and neurodiversity, civil and social uprisings, and a viral pandemic that brought the entire world to a halt all came together to challenge my perceptions of all of my plans, including this thesis. To be wholly transparent, it would not be responsible for me to present a formalized argument based on my last several years of study, as I am still deeply entrenched in learning about this newfound version of myself and what that means for my personal, professional, and academic contributions moving forward.

Taking the shape of a personal narrative, this work documents my navigation of profound extrinsic and intrinsic events through the lens of a designer, educator, and self-advocate. Each chapter covers a small step of my journey and is subsequently paired with relevant quotes and passages taken from various references, including quotes from Facebook users which I have kept anonymous in order to protect participants in this project. I have added an appendix that provides visual examples and links to relevant media (indicated in brackets). I include these to support, bring context, and provide texture to the narrative, as well as an invitation to further reading. This work is for any reader who may find themselves interested in how design-thinking can transcend simple product development strategy and influence an educator's response to change, crisis, and self-discovery. Consequently, this work is as much for myself as it is for you, and I thank you for joining me in this retrospective.

1

An Unexpected Exodus

In the fall of 2020, at age 35, I resigned from my position as an elementary art teacher and decided to retire from American public education all together. Simply put, in the middle of a deadly and aerosolized pandemic, my employer refused to give myself and my colleagues agency for developing safety plans for our own working environments. I, like thousands of other educators, felt that resignation was the only sure way to protect our health and the health of our families. Concern for my health related to COVID-19 was not the only reason I made the final decision to resign and retire. Again, like many other educators, I developed mental, emotional, and physical illness as a result of the untenable demands of the job that did not align with my values, institutional barriers to using my skills and talents, profound abuse[A.1] from my administration, and a lack of support from my union leadership.

In a nationwide poll of educators, NEA found that 28 percent said the COVID-19 pandemic has made them more likely to retire early or leave the profession, a rate that could far worsen the U.S.'s shortage of qualified teachers.

“It kills me to leave, but I think it would kill me—literally—to stay,” says a tearful Pennsylvania reading specialist Ariel Franchak. (Flannery, 2020)

The teacher's occupational stress is positively correlated with job burnout, that is, the greater the occupational stress, the worse the burnout phenomenon; the teachers' occupational stress is also significantly concerned with their mental health. The probability that teachers' mental health problem occurs increases as their occupational stresses are added more. (Wu, 2020, 314-315)

In the most recent PDK poll, half of teachers surveyed said they had considered leaving the profession within the last year, with low pay and high stress most frequently cited as the reasons.

(McCarthy, 2019, 8)

“If you're killing yourself 10 hours a day and nothing is right and [students are] not succeeding, there's just no fulfillment,” one teacher named Beth said. For her, the pressure came largely from the school administration mandating daily faculty meetings and increased teacher scrutiny to raise the state test scores. It was enough to lead to her suicidal ideation. “The thoughts that I had this time were that it would just be so easy to drive off the road,” Beth says. While she says there was no plan to actually do so, “it was just there in the back of my mind that it would be so much easier if I wasn't here.”

(Smiley, 2020)

...if stressors are too strong and too persistent in individuals who are biologically vulnerable because of age, genetic, or constitutional factors, stressors may lead to disease.

(Schneiderman, Ironson, and Siegel, 2005)

Forty-six percent of teachers report high daily stress, which compromises their health, sleep, quality of life, and teaching performance.

(Greenberg, Brown, and Abenavoli, 2016)

At this point, I am certain that I am physically unable to perform the duties of a public educator in America. I can no longer execute directives that force me to interact with children in a way that I know causes them harm. I have attempted to meet these professional expectations at the expense of my health and well-being, and it has now become life-threatening. It is impossible for me to meet demands that are in absolute opposition to my values while maintaining my health and well-being.

(Steinhauer, 2020, 1)

A Redirected Response

At the time of my resignation, I was approaching the last stretch of earning a dual Master's in Art and Technology with a focus in Design—degrees I had pursued throughout most of my tenure as a public educator. This multidisciplinary program provided theory and praxis in project management and storytelling strategies, as well as graphic, web, social media, and user experience design. A natural systems thinker, I became interested in developing both physical and digital experiences, specifically through the lens of design-thinking/human centered strategies.

It is my firm belief that a lack of these strategies in the American education and union systems is a root cause of the problems experienced by both educators and learners. While I can no longer work within those systems to advocate for those strategies, I have applied my skills and interests in these areas to working with and developing grassroots organizations for educator advocacy—a topic of which I have grown deeply passionate about. These new organizations and tools are directed at educators who are seeking personal empowerment, protection from abuse, and opportunities for self-advocacy and collective action. The purpose of my work is to equip them with information and support systems that I, and other educators who have left the field, recognize would have helped prevent much of the stress, trauma, illness, and other losses we have experienced. In the following chapters I discuss one of these projects in particular through personal narrative paired with theoretical, qualitative, and academic references, as well as opinion pieces and visual examples. I reflect on my response to workplace trauma by taking a human-centered/design-thinking approach to ideate, develop, and collaborate in *TeachUp*—a virtual community to support and empower educators[A.2].

The beauty of this [thinking systems] mindset is that its mental models are based on natural laws, principles of interrelationship, and interdependence found in all living systems.

They give us a new view of ourselves and our many systems, from the tiniest cell to the entire earth; and as our organizations are included in that great range, they help us define organizational problems as systems problems, so we can respond in more productive ways.

The systems thinking mindset is a new orientation to life. In many ways it also operates as a worldview—an overall perspective on, and understanding of, the world.

(Haines, 1998, 2)

While there are many possible approaches to problem solving and creation in the broader discipline of design, design thinking explicitly takes a human-centered approach. Design thinking stems from the perspective that all design activity is social in nature, therefore humans must be at the center of the process.

(Clarke, 2020, The Design Thinking Mindset)

Thus, educational design has been focusing on the question of how to get ‘manageable bundles’ of existing knowledge into people’s brains. But we are headed into a world where humans as being a container of mere knowledge is way less needed than humans as being confident and creative designers of the future.

(Tschepe, 2018)

...labor’s current social justice approach suffers from two critical flaws. First, it has gone hand in hand with an abandonment of the strike weapon. Second, this approach has depended on alliances from on high—with relatively weak nonprofits and community leaders—instead of relying on rank-and-file workers to organize and mobilize the broader working-class communities of which they are an integral part.

(Blanc, 2019, 77)

3

A Call for Connection

Throughout my teaching career, I knew that the negative experiences I was having at work were caused by deeper fundamental problems, such as a lack of agency and oppressive bureaucratic structures. I believed that there were plenty of opportunities to develop solutions. I wanted to openly talk about this, but most others did not. While many colleagues expressed they felt the same way, I did not get feedback from them that suggested they were comfortable addressing the bigger picture problems we identified. They were either bogged down by their professional responsibilities or feared retaliation for speaking up. I did not blame them, as I also suffered alienation and retaliation from leadership for attempting to start a discussion. I felt deeply isolated, as though I was the only one who was ready to take action to advocate for change. Deep down I believed that while I might have been alone in my local school district, I surely could not be the only educator in the country who was going through this.

In an attempt to seek connection, I started to write down my thoughts and post them publicly on social media. During *Spirit Week*, when we were asked to dress differently based on various themes, I wore costumes that addressed larger statements related to my concerns, sharing selfies and descriptions on social media as well[A.3]. I made these posts public, so that they could reach anyone, hoping they might encourage others to engage in the discussion as well. While deep in the age of viral hashtags that had the ability to make an impact, I wanted to add a consistent hashtag to these posts that both spoke to my experiences and would resonate with other educators. I was struggling to find something that made sense, and was hoping inspiration would eventually strike.

As educators, we find ourselves in staff meetings, team meetings, leadership meetings, and other committee meetings throughout the already busy educational week, not to mention the most important part of the week helping children learn and grow. I've seen, as I believe most of us have, where at times those numerous meetings are met with a deafening silence.

There are a number of reasons this happens, and we can all make assumptions about why, but all too often, when the meeting breaks and we move back to the classrooms or the hallways and you hear that silence break into the small conversations, the whispers behind closed doors, texts sharing comments, and email chats back and forth criticizing or asking everyone questions with the exception of the one person that could actually answer the questions. Those conversations, those timeouts make it about us and not the students, and that's dangerous.

Then, we wonder why negativity flourishes and culture is average at best?
(Ferlazzo, 2020)

Despite the US Constitution being a "living document," there are educators who are petrified of speaking out against the wrongs we are currently witnessing in education today. To demonstrate how freedom of speech is non-existent in some schools, walk into any school and ask a teacher to go on record to discuss the ills in public education. Instead of getting an abundance of answers you will be met with a deafening silence. Silence not because teachers don't have an opinion, but silence because their words many times are used to hurt them professionally. Apparently, the first amendment does not apply to teachers.
(Warren, 2013)

As we have seen from our case studies, social media can be used to construct a sense of solidarity within a diverse constituency, sharing a common sense of indignation, anger, frustration and perception of shared victimhood in face of a corrupt system.
(Gerbaudo, 2012, 16)

4

A Designer's Dilemma

As a designer, I could identify root problems with many practices expected of us at work and their negative impact on both students and staff. I believe that educators are inherently designers of learning experiences and therefore have an obligation to address such problems. We simply lacked the professional agency to solve them on our own. Discussing them with our administration made us vulnerable to being labeled as a *troublemaker* and could often result in reprimand, alienation, and retaliation. For the sake of preserving my work environment and livelihood, I initially attempted to avoid conflict by executing the problematic and harmful directives without complaint and performing my *other professional duties* (vague contract language commonly used by administrators to justify forcing educators to do almost anything). Eventually, the constant misalignment of living outside of my values took a devastating toll on my overall health and well-being.

The designer in me could not help but seek out the root problem of this paradox, and landed on our lack of professional agency as the primary cause, attributing much of it to my administration's leadership practices. I wholeheartedly believed that my colleagues and I were the experts in our work, and therefore believed our leadership could learn a lot from our insights, if only there were a way for us to do so that did not result in discipline. In a discussion with my partner, who is also a designer, he said that in private industry this concept is known as *managing up*, which is building upon your superior's existing skills in a way that makes your work and relationship more effective. This seemed like an approach worth exploring, and so I used the hashtag *#TeachUp*. I began adding this to all public posts I made encouraging teachers to speak authentically in their concerns about education or working environments[A.4].

When you are hired to design something, it is for your expertise. Your job is not just to produce that work but to evaluate the impact of that work. Your job is to relay the impact of that work to your client or employer. Should that impact be negative, it is your job to relay that to your client along with a way, if possible, to eliminate the negative impact of the work. If it's impossible to eliminate the negative impact of the work, it's your job to stop it from seeing the light of day.

(Montiero, 2019, 20)

Teachers resent directives forced upon them from above and decision-making processes in which they have little input. They feel that they have little opportunity to express ideas to policy makers, and that administrators manipulate them and can be either too authoritarian or non-directive.

(California State Department of Education, 1983, 44)

When educators find themselves in circumstances where just action is both

obligatory and impossible, I argue that they suffer moral injury: the trauma of perpetrating significant moral wrong against others despite one's wholehearted desire and responsibility to do otherwise.

(Levinson, 2015, Just Action and Moral Injury)

Studies that have evaluated core features of moral injury (e.g., guilt and shame related to trauma) have also found these to be associated with more severe PTSD, depression, and functional impairment.

(Norman and Maguen, 2020)

If you recognize [your boss isn't] fulfilling the mission of the enterprise, more power to you for stepping up," says Useem. You don't have to cover up mistakes but do what's best for the organization. "Leadership goes up just as often as it goes down," says Useem. You need to do this without harboring resentment. Do it because you know that it's necessary for the good of the team.

(Gallo, 2011)

A Dialectical Disruption

The small step of putting out some public posts with a new hashtag did not create any deep connections or relationships with other educators who wanted to advocate for change. Eventually, I became so ill from the stress at work that I took a leave. During that time, which included a course of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)[A.5], I learned a lot about what I needed to feel well, what had triggered the symptoms of my illness, how to look for balance in all challenges, and how to develop boundaries for myself in order to preserve my health. I became an effective advocate for myself and my disability, and though I was able to fend off a lot, it did not stop my administrators from attempting to repeat the abusive tactics that had led to so much of my earlier stress.

A few months later, the COVID-19 pandemic forced me and the rest of the country into a state of indefinite quarantine. This was a time of great uncertainty for educators and administrators, as there was no playbook or precedent for how to best respond to an environment shift of such magnitude. I could not help myself from dialectically recognizing that it was as much a problem as it was an opportunity to reimagine my work life and education in general. I began strategizing ideas that would not only pivot my curriculum to an online delivery, but also had the potential to benefit all staff and students during and after COVID-19. I reached out to my principal to offer my skills to help and was told that they would keep me in mind. In preparation for his response, I developed concept maps and prototypes for web tools that used existing and new platforms[A.6], with the goal of creating something that was both familiar and intuitive for students, parents, and staff.

The basic components of DBT include individual psychotherapy (conducted in a fairly structured manner); skills training, which typically takes place in a weekly seminar-type format and during which skills are taught to help individuals with severe emotion regulation problems...Dialectics is a philosophical concept that includes several assumptions: (a) all things are connected; (b) change is inevitable and continual; and (c) opposites can be integrated to develop a closer approximation of the truth.

(Brodsky and Stanley, 2013, 6)

...fewer than 30 percent of teachers [surveyed] indicated receiving any training over the past year [2019-2020] with regard to ensuring that distance learning activities are accessible to all students, differentiating distance learning to meet individual student needs, engaging families in at-home learning, or providing distance learning opportunities that support students' social and emotional well-being.

(Hamilton, Kaufman, and Diliberti, 2020)

No one looked at the COVID-19 outbreak as a design problem, but the crisis offers a chance to question the wisdom of old habits and to explore out-of-the-box thinking. Applying the design thinking process, designers and design thinkers can play a vital role in diagnosing the most pressing issues and come up with solutions.

(Philips, Accessed April 11, 2021)

Hence, when making decisions about what forms of online education to use, it is advisable to examine the evidence of effectiveness of specific configurations of each program and the measured outcomes rather than accepting or rejecting a program or model simply because it is online. Moreover, in order to improve online education, it is essential for designers and researchers to carefully look at the specific variables or combination thereof and the specific outcomes they are intended to affect.

(Zhao, 2020, 193-194)

6

An Overlooked Opportunity

After receiving positive feedback from staff and parents about the online learning prototypes I had created, I shared these plans with my administration only to be told that they had already decided to proceed with Blackboard, a tool that was both less familiar and not as intuitive. Other prototypes were declined or criticized without review, and my criticism of this was met with formal reprimand. However, weeks later I was asked if I could use my art talents to create a poster for an upcoming extra-curricular event. This only fortified the reality that my skills were only useful when it pleased the plans of those in power, regardless of the fact that they were paying for me to acquire them.

This dismissal of innovative ideas was a common experience for myself, my colleagues, and as I later discovered, many public educators in America. While administrators scrambled to develop board approved plans, teachers had the freedom to utilize their professional talents, skills, and experiences to reach their students in some of the most compassionate and inventive ways. They received immense praise and support from administrators who were paralyzed with the absence of a script, and parents who became familiar with the labor involved in educating their own children. Eventually, the board approved plans (which rarely included input from educators) were pushed through, and it was back to business as usual. Educators were required to follow these directives, regardless of how they vocalized the harm they would cause, or the success of the systems they had created themselves. Sure enough, as safety plans written only by administrators, lawyers, and board members rolled out and educators expressed their concerns about returning to in person instruction without adequate safety measures, the conversation changed from “teachers are heroes” to “remote learning is not working” and “teachers are lazy and just don’t want to go back to work.”

Encouragingly, our results suggest that what schools do during the pandemic to support teachers' matters most. Schools might begin by addressing the processes that our study highlights as important to teachers in times of change, such as developing systems for strong communication and for recognizing teachers' efforts. In addition, they might work with teachers to solicit and set expectations for work, determine training that teachers need, and design structures for formal and informal collaboration. By investing in these aspects of working conditions, schools will be better prepared to navigate organizational change. Weathering such change—especially during an ongoing and unpredictable crisis—depends on a culture where both organizational systems and interpersonal relationships exist and can support the improvisation and swift action required.

(Kraft, Simon, and Lyon, 2020, 30)

In many cases, educators did not feel that they were adequately engaged in decision-making, especially when it came to educational technology. As one respondent to our survey explained it, “[The] district decides what is useful based on their own decisions, without teacher input.”

(Burstein, 2020, 15)

Ironically, COVID-19 has brought a newfound appreciation for teachers from parents. Those quarantined at home with their children have come to understand intimately what teachers have been saying all along: their work is hard, they deserve more pay and they need more resources.

Yet, even as we say we value teachers for their creativity, patience and skill, education policy continues to tie their hands. Teachers are free to innovate only so long as they do so in lockstep and their students show mastery of knowledge someone else deemed important on a test created by others.

(D'Amico, 2020)

I'm glad more and more people are recognizing what teachers do in terms of instruction and learning. If ever there was a year to make Teacher Appreciation Week the biggest celebration ever, this is the year. I don't even know where to begin to say my words of gratitude to my own children's teachers, my friends and colleagues, and all teachers across the country. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
(Weber, 2020)

You're the first teachers to tackle a challenge like the one we're facing now. Years from now, 2020 will be remembered as the year we all learned how to live life at a distance from each other and continue to function as a society.

Pause a moment and realize that what you're doing matters. It matters not just for the students you have in your classes today, but also for the future. You're part of large-scale systemic change and are making history.
(Morin, 2020)

...and to be honest with you, you may say I'm cold and calloused for this next statement, I really could give a darn, because at the end of the day I mean it. Our children are more important than teachers' lives. Our children are failing and being left behind right now at record rates and are committing suicide at record rates. That is more important than if a teacher were to contract Covid and pass away. I'm sorry, it's the truth.

(Public Comment, Perkiomen Valley School School District Board Meeting, 2021, 3:25:11)

...maybe these teachers should try letting other educators who aren't afraid of getting sick educate the kids 🧑 Don't they go into the teaching occupation to serve the children and not their own self interests? If they feel they can't do their job due to a pandemic why don't they step aside and let someone who can.. do it?
😞

(Anonymous Facebook Comment, August 15, 2020)

A Search for Solidarity

The stress COVID-19 placed on educators reignited my desire to discuss and ideate action-oriented solutions for the systemic problems facing education and educational leadership with other teachers. This was a taboo subject among my colleagues, and I was unsure where I might find a place to start. A cursory Facebook and Google search of *teacher empowerment*, *honest teachers*, *teachers speak up*, etc., came up fairly short-handed. Most teaching groups were built for educators to share resources, ideas, or to vent about the day-to-day struggles. Though I was seeking something much deeper, I joined these groups with the hope that they might lead me somewhere.

In April 2020, after being formally reprimanded for speaking truth to my principal and colleagues about toxic management practices, I was desperate to find a group of teachers wherein I could process these experiences. In one Facebook group, *We Are Teachers: HELPLINE*, I posted a link to an article about teacher advocacy entitled “Teaching Without Fear.” I expressed my loneliness and isolation and asked if anyone else felt the same speaking their truths. Within hours, I had responses from 16 teachers who told me how much they related to my situation. In fact, one of those teachers sent me a private message. We spent the next couple of hours texting one another about our stories of frustration, abuse, and hopelessness we had for the profession, questioning our ability to maintain our health in the meantime. We shared ideas for ways it could improve if only more educators would stop accepting the status quo and demand something better. From Montreal to Pennsylvania, we developed a connection from 500 miles apart, deeper than connections I had made with educators who worked beside me for years. This was a promising interaction that drove me to continue searching.

After teaching for 10 years, Judith is respected by her colleagues and supervisors. She is hard-working and committed to continually learning and growing. But beneath Judith's calm and confident surface is fear. She believes that the school is sometimes headed in the wrong direction and she and her colleagues will fail at the important work of educating students. She has lots of ideas about what might help the school move forward, but she refrains from expressing them during team and faculty meetings because she has seen some of her colleagues get labeled as "difficult" when they have spoken out. Frustrated by the current direction and intimidated by senior colleagues who tend to agree with it, Judith has considered changing schools or even the profession altogether.

(Martin, 2020, first section)

I need help. I feel like I am alone and drowning. Are there other teachers out there who are tired of being afraid to speak their truths?

(Steinhauer, Facebook Post April 25, 2020)

"Yep, as a Union Rep that is often how I feel. I speak up, only I speak up, but everything I do benefits everyone. Sometimes it is hard. But I could not live with myself if I let the bad stuff flourish. Although, I do have to say sometimes there is so much not working and if no one else is willing to do anything that it sometimes means I have to guard my health instead."

"My consequence for speaking--I am punished and the others concerned are on an "improvement plan" to ensure it never happens again. I stood up for what was right and in the end my career it is shredded. That is why others don't stand up--they see those of us that do get hit and hit hard."

"I immediately sent a separate email to my principal explaining that I am under stress and apologizing for sounding so harsh. When I thought about it later, I felt like I had every right to stick up for myself and my team."

(Anonymous Facebook Comments, April 25, 2020)

8

An Affirmation to Actualize

If one social media call for help could encourage total strangers to engage so intimately, surely there were more educators who were looking for the same connection. I felt validated knowing I was not alone and that there was a need for a space for teachers like me. My first step was to see if such a space already existed, so I researched more online and put a call out to Facebook teacher groups, which led to a few leads. While these suggested groups were full of activated and outspoken educators, the discussions taking place were mostly through posts and comments. Those that appeared to offer synchronous meetings with other educators were related to union caucuses in specific cities or for specific policy topics. The users existed, we just needed a space where we could process our concerns and ideas more intimately. After years of having my creativity stifled in public education, I saw an opportunity to put my design skills to work outside of the confines of an administration, and set off to start building the community I imagined.

How difficult will it be to form a community?

To determine this, ask:

- *Is the community readily identifiable?*
- *Does the community already exist offline?*
- *Does the community already exist online?*
- *Is there a history of collaboration?*

- *Is the culture of the target community already conducive to community collaboration and social media?*

A grassroots community has a greater chance of success if the community already exists and is already collaborating, and simply needs a better set of technology tools.

(Bradley and McDonald, 2011, 65)

9

An Appeal for Adoption

The next phase of the journey began with creating a private Facebook group named *TeachUp*. The goal was to create a space for the sole purpose of bringing educators together who wanted to build a community where we could regularly speak, share, process, and respond to our experiences and concerns for our profession and public education. It was to be a place for tough questions, actionable feedback, challenging discussions, and unconditional support and validation. I was still in the research phase of developing this idea, so initially I started by looking at existing teacher Facebook groups for what tools, resources, and opportunities for interaction were already being provided and how teachers were or were not engaging with them. At the same time, I wanted to put the group out there immediately, as rapid prototyping is a best practice strategy for gathering feedback on what works and what might need to be adjusted to meet the users—who in this case were educators, including myself.

In order to bring in members, I posted about *TeachUp* in several teachers' groups and sent direct messages to those who had specifically expressed interest in joining a community like it. Coincidentally, one of the groups was experiencing criticism because its moderators were censoring discourse, and I used that as an opportunity to advertise *TeachUp* as a group that was built for such conversations. Not long after, *TeachUp* had hundreds of new members. With a flood of new members, the next step was to do some simple user research to get an idea of who was coming into this space, what needs they had, and how they were likely to be most engaged.

...if you want to be a creator instead of a mere consumer you must see ideas currently in the world as fuel for your mind. You must stop seeing them as objects or functional things: they are combinations of ingredients waiting for reuse.

(Berkun, 2008)

The thing to remember is: don't copy, don't steal, but improve, make it better, make it easier, make it more enjoyable.

Don't reskin it, but rethink it.

(Cantuni, 2018)

You must also understand your competition.

Does the product already exist or have you developed something completely new. If you are re-working a product which already exists, but you feel your design is better; more ergonomic, or user-friendly? In this case you must test your product to make sure that it really is better than those that already exist, and for this you must prototype.

(MRT Castings, 2017)

Most problems worth worrying about are complex, and a series of early experiments is often the best way to decide among competing directions. The faster we make our ideas tangible, the sooner we will be able to evaluate them, refine them, and zero in on the best solution.

(Brown, 2009, 68)

The most fundamental reason for doing user research is that it's the only way to achieve an understanding of the people who are going to use your design. If you understand your users, you can make designs that are relevant for them. If you don't have a clear understanding of your users, you have no way of knowing whether your design will be relevant. A design that is not relevant to its target audience will never be a success.

(Mortensen, 2021)

A Baseline Beginning

The first step was to welcome new members to the space and provide an opportunity for them to share about themselves and their needs. I created an announcement post that was pinned to the top of the group, so that anyone just joining would see an immediate Call To Action (CTA). The CTA encouraged them to introduce themselves, share their stories, and talk about ways that this community might help them find and/or amplify their voices as educators. I replied to those who responded by welcoming them and validating their stories. It was refreshing to see so many strangers willingly open up in ways I had never witnessed with fellow teachers during my 12 years in the field. When they responded to one another, it reassured me that this was something teachers needed. It was the beginning of the community I had imagined. The comments gave me early insights into many of their most pressing concerns, such as a lack of administrative support, school violence, systemic racism, and retaliation for speaking up.

In the first announcement post I also encouraged new members to invite others to this space. With that, I needed to ensure that when people first came to the group, they would have a good understanding of the goals of the community as well as some basic expectations for communication., I wrote a group description[A.7] emphasizing the difference between this group and other teachers' groups. I wanted teachers to read our description and immediately know they were in a space that welcomed their voice, even if and especially if it challenged the status quo of our education system. Because I set this up as a private group, I also created questions that new members would have to answer before being admitted. These revolved around their relationship to education and willingness to engage in challenging discourse and critical feedback.

Finally, I developed a series of community guidelines[A.8] hoping to set the tone for content and communication. I emphasized this was not a place for forced positivity, and that every member had freedom to express their honest thoughts about their experiences. I asked members to keep the content relevant to educator empowerment and challenging the harmful parts of our systems. I reminded them that there are many other groups dedicated to posting funny teacher memes, everyday questions, or basic teaching tips. The last guideline was about working together with other members to find the right words, and offer curiosity before judgement when it came to inevitable disagreements. With this basic foundation, I was looking forward to learning more about members and building meaningful relationships.

You want to inspire and encourage a baseline quality of communication. This is not about excluding people who are imperfect writers or speakers, but rather about providing a consistent example of simple approaches to communication that make the community easier to understand and more pleasurable for everyone involved.

(Bacon, 2012, 72)

“As a veteran in this business, I am weary of being my students’ voice and continuing to be retaliated against. Admin knows when they call me in that I will tell them off and put them in their place in the most professional way

possible. I am looking forward to being mentored by others in this group to use what energy I have left to strive for justice in my profession and not die in the process.”

“ I am someone who cares deeply about and speaks up for marginalized students. That encompasses anti racism and actively working toward race awareness and equity. If you are in this group I expect that you already know by what I’ve shared that my experience is not an easy one, or a pleasant one, but a necessary one.”

(Facebook Comments, TeachUp Users, May 21, 2020)

An Intentional Intimacy

This was my first attempt at building an online community with strangers, and I took an experimental approach to the design process. I was bursting with possibilities of the things we could discuss, the ways in which we might offer support to one another, and the potential deliverables we could create to inspire and empower others. I knew that I wanted to build relationships with the other members, so I thought it might be best to just put myself out there as authentically as I could so that others might feel inspired to do the same. I had never felt the freedom to do so without consequence in my professional community, and the idea both excited and intimidated me.

I remembered a mentorship practice we used at school to build relationships with students. The *2 x 10 strategy* was spending two minutes intentionally with a mentee student for ten school days in a row. Through an extended approach of getting to know them more intimately than what was typically afforded in the regular school day, it created trust with students who may otherwise have lacked it with adults in the building. While its original intent was to curb student misconduct, my experience with it had always been about the value of making connections with some of the most interesting and important people I've ever known—my students. While inspired by this technique, my interpretation of it for *TeachUp* looked slightly different in a virtual setting with adults. For the first several days, I made brief video clips of myself expressing my honest thoughts about a specific issue or concept in education and would end with an open-ended question to the group to see how they perceived the same issues. My first “vlog talk” posed the question, *What is the difference between a trailblazer and a troublemaker?*^[A.9] These video posts generated interesting conversations, revealing insights into the members who participated, and which topics were most engaging.

We believe that a solution is out there and that by keeping focused on the people we're designing for and asking the right questions, we'll get there together. We dream up lots of ideas, some that work and some that don't. We make our ideas tangible so that we can test them, and then we refine them. In the end, our approach amounts to wild creativity, to a ceaseless push to innovate, and a confidence that leads us to solutions we'd never dreamed of when we started.

(IDEO, 2015, 10)

Change occurs at the interface between the individual and the collective. Each of our stories tells of a search for our places in the community, of ways in which we tried to come to terms with changing contexts.

(Christiansen and Ramadevi, 2002, 15)

...in order to think powerful thoughts and do powerful deeds, one needs to be able to tap into the sources of one's creativity. And in order to do that, one must allow oneself to become vulnerable to the vicissitudes, to the interchange between internal and external reality.

(Brunning, 2014, 19)

The 2 x 10 strategy has been used as far back as 1983, when it was introduced by Ray Wlodkowski, and it has become a highly effective teaching practice that appears to work almost universally. The strategy is simple: spend 2 minutes per day for 10 consecutive days talking with an at-risk student about anything the student wants to talk about. Many teachers use this technique with all students.

The 2 x 10 strategy takes the pressure off both you and the student. It's a brief intervention for at-risk students and a great relationship-building activity.

(Sprenger, 2020, 29)

A Conscious Composition

In order to further the reach of *TeachUp*, I needed to build a stronger social media presence, which meant developing a visual brand. Initially, Early on, I had designed a cursory logo[A.10], incorporating the letter “T” for *Teach* and an arrow for *Up*. I used the color red, which is often associated with teaching and labor activism to give it a sense of strength and familiarity. To ensure that our visual content was both responsive and culturally conscious, I researched logos with similar designs. I found that it too closely resembled some right-wing extremist logos, which was an unacceptable potential mental connection or visual association. I redesigned a style guide[A.11] with a black/grey dominant palette to represent strength and boldness. I included yellow-orange—another color associated with teaching (buses, pencils), complementing it with blue-violet for balance and contrast. Finally, I used the imagery of an apple, arrow, and pencil for visual association and texture. This pivot better aligned with our purpose and received favorable feedback from members.

Design, after all, acts as a mediator between ideas and the physical world, and good design is that which is dedicated to the greater good of humanity. Ethical and moral responsibilities are essential. By the same token, cultural responsibility in design is the respect and concern a designer has for the different languages and customs of people. Culturally responsible design considers people. Culturally

responsible design considers the history, language, customs, habits, traits and behaviours unique to specific groups. Concepts and visual languages may be borrowed from one specific culture, yet they can hold different connotations for another culture. Good design must therefore consider cultural context so that ideas expressed are not misinterpreted.
(Kokil, 2015)

An Identity Epiphany

Using Instagram and Twitter accounts for *TeachUp*, I relied on their inherent algorithms for follower suggestions. I discovered more educational activist groups than I had when I was searching from my personal account, which had been tailored to reflect all of my personal interests. Membership grew through mutual following, and I could share content from other more well-established groups and influencers into our space. These new perspectives challenged our thinking about education.

One particular new member was a blogger by the name of “Autistic and Teaching,” an autistic self-advocate and teacher whose work revolves around educating the public (especially teachers) about the experiences of the Actually Autistic community. They shared polls taken from the community that showed a variety of things, such as how most autistics prefer to use identity-first language (*I am autistic*) as opposed to person-first language (*I am a person with autism*)[A.12]. This was in direct contrast to what I and other teachers in the group had been taught in our training, and it generated a tense debate among members. In moderating those debates, I referenced our community guidelines and validated the experiences of all members. At the same time, I made it clear that only those with personal lived experience with any identity can be considered an authority on that identity, regardless of how much training others have had. For far too long, the autistic community has been stripped of their autonomy and seen as having a disease that needs to be cured, rather than an existence that deserves to be affirmed and celebrated like any other. Autistic self-advocates use the mantra *Nothing About Us Without Us*, which was adopted by disability activists in the 1990s, to assert that anything related to autism must be done with intentional input and oversight from those who are actually autistic. This concept certainly resonates with teachers

who are advocating that any designs or plans for education must be done with input and guidance from professional educators with personal lived experience.

This post and its resulting conversation led me to explore more of Autistic and Teaching's content. From there I discovered The Autistic Self-Advocacy Network and a wide network of social media influencers, all offering invaluable resources. I had recently become a step-parent to an autistic child, and this information has significantly transformed the way our family approaches his physical, emotional, social, mental, and academic needs. This process of taking ownership of the harm I have unintentionally caused him and my students has not been easy. At the same time, as Maya Angelou put it, "When you know better, do better," and that has become a pillar of the *TeachUp* mindset.

As I learn more about Autism and neurodiversity, I have come to realize that much of the lived experiences being shared and discussed genuinely resonate with my own. While I remain undiagnosed, many things about myself that used to make me feel as though I was *wrong* or *did not belong*, have been affirmed by a new community that welcomes me as I am. Interestingly enough, one of these attributes is an inability to accept injustice and a laser-focused approach to addressing it—the exact mindset that drove me to create *TeachUp*.

As autistic people, we know more about autism than anyone else. We know the problems that autistic people face, and have lots of ideas about how to solve them. Some non-autistic people say they are "autism experts," and try to make policies about autism without talking to autistic people ourselves. These policies usually	don't help us, and sometimes even make things worse for us. That is why autistic people have to be involved in making policy. We have a right to have our voices heard in the national conversation about us. There are no exceptions. (ASAN, 2021)
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

An Invitation to Ideate

I began doing some brainstorming to ideate ways that the *TeachUp* community might become more intentionally developed. For this, it needed a more formalized mission statement with foundational values, so that any new work would have a stronger sense of direction and purpose. I started with a whiteboard brainstorming exercise, jotting down some basic thoughts I had about the identity of being an educator, including making a list of things I thought were our universal values. Naturally, I reached a stopping point where my singular perspective could no longer move the ideation forward. Thinking like an educator, I decided to finish my session with a question that others might answer to help further the ideation: *How can we use our skills, values, and identities as teachers to affect meaningful change in education?* I subversively called it the MFEQ (short for *Mother Fucking Essential Question*), as a parody of the *Lesson Essential Question* (LEQ) that public school teachers use in lesson planning. While the LEQ itself is helpful to guide our work, the act of forced lesson planning by micromanaging administrators and educational leaders is a sore spot for many teachers. I posted a photo of this whiteboard to the group with a text overlay of YOUR THOUGHTS HERE, asking members to share what they believed to be the universal values of educators[A.13].

Ideally, brainstorming sessions happen synchronously, so the next step was to create opportunities for members to meet face-to-face safely over Zoom so that we could form deeper connections, work together to answer the MFEQ, and start to develop the community in a more intentional way. I used Doodle Polls to get a sense of what times people could meet and it was an even split between the morning and the evening. So I invited all members to join me in a Zoom video conference call at either 8:00 AM or 8:00 PM the following Thursday.

The mission statement is integral to your community's strategy because it is used to define future goals, as well as operational tactics. By defining the purpose of your community, you can better understand the goals your community is committed to achieving.

(Hivebrite, 2020)

Today, brainstorming is deployed everywhere from kindergarten classrooms to corporate boardrooms. Brainstorming and related techniques help designers define problems and come up with initial concepts at the start of a project. These processes can yield written lists as well as quick sketches and diagrams. They are a handy way to open up your mind and unleash the power of odd-ball notions.

(Lupton, 2011, 16)

Lesson plans, in short, are a product of the assembly line notion of education: put a lesson plan in place, and any teacher can achieve the desired results by following the infallible points in the lesson plans. Thinking, then, is no longer, necessary, and certainly isn't even desirable, for the teacher can just push the conveyor belt to graduation.

The administrative goal is to gather a nice fat file of lesson plans, which satisfies all the bureaucratic notion of what is good teaching, but which need not be looked at for another century or so.

(Kritzberg, 2018)

Essential questions are questions you would ask students to make sure they understood the essential information or concepts in your lesson. They support the standards and help guide students' learning. These questions can not be answered with a simple yes or no, but instead require students to think critically and develop their own answers.

(DeWilde, 2020)

A Collective Commencement

As I stared at the empty Zoom room on the morning of the very first *TeachUp* meeting, my anxiety wavered between total excitement and sheer dread. I would be lying if I said that I did not feel a little relief along with my disappointment when none of our members joined. I was finally creating something with full autonomy, and each new step was as much an opportunity to be validated as it was to fail. For that reason, simply not doing it was always a safe alternative.

That same evening, however, five other educators joined in. Three were friends from the local area who were interested in learning more about *TeachUp*, one was from Texas, and the other was from Montreal, Quebec. I had advertised the meeting as a brainstorming session to identify some universal values of educators and to try to answer the MFEQ. I introduced myself and the origins of *TeachUp* and then opened the floor for others to introduce themselves, telling us a little bit about what brought them here, and what they wanted to get from this space. What I thought was going to be a quick rotation ended up lasting longer than the two hours we had scheduled. Every participant took a turn offering a synopsis of their personal journeys of hope, trauma, and triumph as a public educator.

After hours of holding space, validating, empathizing, and many tears, we all shared a collective deep breath, taking stock of what had just happened. We organically transitioned into a conversation of reflection. There was such catharsis in authentically telling our stories and having them received without denial, judgement, expectation, or advice. We were in awe of the fact that we were able to

quickly get to a place where we felt welcome and comfortable enough to share our stories with complete strangers.

The discussion turned to how healthy it was for us to have found a place to tell our stories, even if that was not the original intent of the meeting. We were able to lean into the longer introductions, rather than force ourselves to shorten them in order to uphold a predetermined agenda. Free from administrative restrictions and expectations, in this space we could exercise our intuition to make decisions that served the needs of the moment, rather than the needs of bureaucracy. We recognized immediately that this was something we wanted to do again sometime soon, and that many others may find it valuable. That night we became a community. Bonded by the power of personal narrative and empowered by the practice of collective agency, the design of TeachUp was no longer mine, but ours.

“When you stand and share your story in an empowering way, your story will heal you and your story will heal somebody else.”

(Iyanla Vanzant)

The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.

(Horton and Friere, 181)

“Alienation is a main problem in our daily lives. There are many advantages and beauty in being able to work together and create together to combat alienation and get ourselves back to being creators as human beings, and creating together to figure out how we’re going to solve the problems that directly affect our lives.”

–José Jorge Díaz Ortiz

(as cited in Jobin-Leeds and AgitArte, 2019, 49)

An Epilogue of Empowerment

After our first official meeting, the *TeachUp* community evolved from a vague concept into a functioning organization. A core group of organizers began meeting regularly for “working sessions” to ideate, strategize, and implement new opportunities for member engagement. We co-developed a strong mission statement[A.14], community foundations[A.15], and meeting agreements[A.16] that kept us grounded and accountable in our discussions. For a few months, we ran weekly *RealTalk* Meetups centered around essential questions such as *How do teachers define experiencing professional abuse in the workplace?*. During these meetings, often with guest speakers, we took notes about our discussions on virtual whiteboards [A.17] that could be shared with members who could not make it. Storytelling and processing remained a central part of our meetings, so when our intended discussions had come to a close, many members stuck around for what we called the *AfterTalk*. In these meetings, we support one another through individual challenges such as protecting our disability rights, changes in teaching assignments, employer discrimination lawsuits, early retirement, and even personal illness and loss. At the same time, it is a space to celebrate the joy that comes from standing in our own power and knowing that there are others standing right beside us.

When the 20-21 school year brought some of the worst working conditions teachers have ever seen, it was clear that most teachers were too burnt out to participate in our events. We responded to this stress not by adding more things to do, but by paring back and meeting weekly solely to authentically share and process in what we called *AfterTalk* Venting Sessions[A.17]. It was in these informal *AfterTalk* sessions that we came up with some of our most exciting projects and ideas, including a nationwide education advocacy tool called *Drawing the Line*[A.18], a storytelling event, and a database of resources to support educators who were facing challenging situations. Our motto

has become *It's an invitation, not an expectation* and we welcome any members who can attend, reminding those that cannot that we are here if they need us in a pinch.

When the reprieve of summer comes, and teachers have the time and energy to look inward, we will be ready to look to one another as comrades, co-creators, and community, as we build the future of *TeachUp*. We will continue this venture through a human-centered/design-thinking approach, knowing that any participant of a community can best thrive when they have the agency, representation, and influence within the organization. Embracing both our autonomy and shared power, we will use our values, skills, and identities as teachers to educate upwardly and affect meaningful change.

References

Autistic Self Advocacy Network, "What is 'Nothing About Us Without Us'?" ASAN. Autistic Self Advocacy Network, Last Modified 2021.

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/position-statements/>

In this informational resource, The Autistic Self Advocacy Network, an organization developed and run by the autistic community, asserts their policy statements beginning with an explanation of their motto, *Nothing About Us Without Us*. It is quoted in this thesis to provide context to narrative statements regarding the work of ASAN and its impact on the *TeachUp* community.

Bacon, Jono. *The Art of Community Building the New Age of Participation*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly, 2012.

In this book, Jono Bacon offers a guide to building online communities through personal experience and interviews with other community management leaders. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements in regards to establishing baseline communication agreements and expectations within an online community space.

Berkun, Scott. "Creative Thinking Hacks," Scott Berkun. Scott Berkun, 2008.

<https://scottberkun.com/2011/ideas-are-made-of-other-ideas/>

In this essay,, author and speaker Scott Berkun offers a variety of approaches to thinking creatively. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding building upon existing online communities to create a new one with a more specific purpose.

Blanc, Eric. Red State Revolt. *The Teachers' Strike Wave and Working-Class Politics*. London: Verso Books, 2019.

In this book, journalist Eric Blanc describes his coverage of the 2018 teachers' wildcat strikes in predominantly conservative and "right-to-work" states with inactive union organizations. He analyzes the origin and evolution of these strikes through historical context, direct observation, and interviews with participants. Through this work, he offers strategies for educators and organizers to apply to their own labor activism. It is quoted in the thesis to support narrative statements in regards to the need for union structures to take a more human-centered approach to working with their members and community.

Bradley, Anthony J., and Mark P. McDonald. *The Social Organization: How to Use Social Media to Tap the Collective Genius of Your Customers and Employees*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review, 2011.

In this book Anthony J Bradley and Mark P. McDonald discuss how social media can be used as a tool to build communities, offering effective strategies to do so collaboratively and effectively. It is quoted in this thesis to provide additional context to narrative statements regarding strategies for social media in community development.

Brodsky, Beth S., and Barbara Stanley. *The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Primer : How DBT Can Inform Clinical Practice*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/goucher-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1186872>.

In this book Beth S Brodsky and Barbara Stanley provide a user-friendly explanation of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy and its implications for use in a clinical practice. It is quoted in this thesis to provide context to narrative statements regarding DBT therapy and how it influenced the author's thought and design processes.

Brown, Tim. *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation*. New York, NY: HarperBusiness, 2009.

In this book, IDEO CEO Tim Brown discusses the idea of design thinking and offers a structured process to follow. It is quoted in this text to support narrative statements regarding early prototyping of designs in order to better understand the needs of the users.

Brunning, Halina. 2014. *Psychoanalytic Essays on Power and Vulnerability*. London: Routledge. <http://search.ebscohost.com/goucher.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=663063&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

In this eBook, Halina Brunning discusses power and vulnerability within leadership and organizations, discussing how the individual and the community are connected. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the author's decision to share her personal experiences as a way to engage other community members.

Burstein, Rachel. *Research Eclipsed: How Educators are Reinventing Research Informed Practice*

During the Pandemic. Portland: EdSurge Research, 2020. Accessed April 11, 2021.

https://d3btwko586hcvj.cloudfront.net/uploads/pdf/file/212/Research_Eclipsed_FIINAL-1600884157.pdf

In this report prepared by Rachel Burstein, EdSurge Research explores how educators are using research-informed practice in their work, particularly in response to the COVID-19 crisis. While EdSurge is not known to be a pro-publication endeavor, this report was quoted in the thesis to support narrative statements regarding the lack of agency educators had in planning learning experiences during COVID-19 related remote instruction.

California State Department of Education. *Improving the Attractiveness of the K-12 Teaching*

Profession in California. Sacramento, CA: Bureau of Publications Sales, 2013.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED237499.pdf>.

This publication explores the status of the teaching profession in California in the early 1980's through quantitative, qualitative, and anecdotal evidence. It suggests that in order to retain more educators, the profession will need to be improved in terms of salary, job security, more supportive school environment, and more. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding educators lacking agency to share their ideas and input.

Cantuni, Rubens. "Your great idea probably already exists, but that's fine." UX Collective. Medium,

June 2, 2018.

<https://uxdesign.cc/your-great-idea-probably-already-exists-but-thats-fine-83a4ab8bd0fd>

In this article for UX Collective, Rubens Cantuni describes the experience of learning that your great design idea has already been explored or developed. He makes the case that this is a beneficial part of the design process, and offers strategies for moving forward. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding rethinking existing online educator communities to create a new one with a more specific vision.

Clarke, Rachel Ivy. *Design Thinking*. Library Futures. Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2020.

<http://search.ebscohost.com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=2433506&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

In this eBook, Rachel Ivy Clarke provides an introduction to design-thinking and its common practices. It is quoted in the thesis to support narrative statements in regard to the author's use of design-thinking.

Christiansen, Helen and S. Ramadevi. 2002. *Reeducating the Educator : Global Perspectives on*

Community Building. SUNY Series, Teacher Preparation and Development. Albany: SUNY Press.

<http://search.ebscohost.com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=81236&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

In this eBook, Helen Christiansen and S. Ramadevi discuss the development of a teacher education community and provide an analysis of various approaches as well as a guide for best practices. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the

author's choice to share her personal experiences as a way to engage community members to do the same.

D'Amico, Diana. "The school reopening debate reveals that we don't listen to teachers about schools," Washington Post. The Washington Post, July 10, 2020.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/07/10/school-reopening-debate-reveals-that-we-dont-listen-teachers-about-schools/>

In this article for the Washington Post, education reform historian Diana D'Amico discusses the lack of support and agency educators have had in plans for their working conditions and job responsibilities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding educators being left out of essential decision making opportunities during the crisis.

DeWilde, Jordan. "How to Use Essential Questions to Guide Online Learning," The Art of Education University Magazine. The Art of Education University, 2020.

<https://theartofeducation.edu/2020/06/24/june-how-to-use-essential-questions-to-guide-online-learning/>

In this article for *The Art of Education University Magazine*, Jordan DeWilde explains the purpose of essential questions for lesson planning and offers strategies for writing and implementing them in the classroom. It is quoted in this text to provide additional context to narrative statements regarding *lesson essential questions*.

Ferlazzo, Larry. 2020. "The Silence of Educators Is Dangerous," *Education Week* (blog), February 15,

2020.

<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-the-silence-of-educators-is-dangerous/2020/02>.

In this blog post for Education Week, high school educator Larry Ferlazzo reviews an interview he held with Marian Dingle, Meg Riordan, Deana Simpson, and Peter DeWitt, Ed.D. on his radio show BAM! Here they discuss their observations of educators who recognize harmful practices for themselves and students, yet choose not to address them with their administrators. They describe this as a dangerous practice that perpetuates that harm. It is quoted in the thesis to support the narrative statements about the lack of educators who will speak up when confronted with known problems in their work.

Flannery, Mary Ellen, "Safety Concerns Over COVID-19 Driving Some Educators Out of the Profession." National Education Association. NEA Today, August 14, 2020.

<https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/safety-concerns-over-covid-19-driving-some-educators-out>

In this article, NEA Today writer Mary Ellen Flannery explores the response to COVID-19 from public educators and National Education Association members through qualitative and quantitative data. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the impact the pandemic had on teachers in 2020 leading into the 20-21 academic year.

Gallo, Amy, "Dealing with Your Incompetent Boss." Harvard Business Review. Harvard Business Publishing, June 06, 2011. <https://hbr.org/2011/06/dealing-with-your-incompetent>

In this article for the Harvard Business Review, Amy Gallo discusses the realities of working with a superior who is not an effective leader, and suggests mental exercises and strategies to help work with them. It is quoted in this thesis to provide support to narrative statements regarding the author's desire for educators to have a greater role in organizational plans.

Gerbaudo, Paolo. *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*. London: Pluto Press, 2012. Accessed April 10, 2021. doi:10.2307/j.ctt183pdzs.

In this book, Paolo Gerbaudo analyzes and discusses the impact of social media on protest movements in the 21st century. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the use of social media to empower a group of people around advocacy for education and educator rights.

Haines, Stephen G. 1998. *The Manager's Pocket Guide to Systems Thinking & Learning*. Amherst, MA: HRD Press.

[http://search.ebscohost.com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=388943&site=ehost-live&scope=site.](http://search.ebscohost.com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=388943&site=ehost-live&scope=site)

In this electronic book, Stephen G Haines presents the concept of systems thinking and how this can be applied to organizations and leadership. It is quoted in this thesis to provide context to narrative statements regarding the author's perspective of her experiences.

Hamilton, Laura S., Julia H. Kaufman, and Melissa Kay Diliberti, *Teaching and Leading Through a Pandemic: Key Findings from the American Educator Panels Spring 2020 COVID-19 Surveys*. Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License, 2020.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR168-2>
https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR168-2.html.

In this research report, Laura S. Hamilton, Julia H. Kaufman, and Melissa Kay Diliberti present findings from COVID-19 surveys held during its 2020 educator panels. It discusses the perspectives of both teachers and administrators and illuminates the inequities of schools while they implemented remote learning during the pandemic. While the RAND corporation is not known to be a pro-public education endeavor, it was quoted in this thesis to provide context to narrative statements regarding the lack of training educators were given going into remote instruction in March 2020.

Hivebrite. "Why you Need a Mission Statement for Your Community." Hivebrite (blog). Hivebrite, Last Modified 2020.

<https://blog.hivebrite.com/why-you-need-a-community-mission-statement>

In this blog post, Hivebrite, a community management platform explains the importance and purpose of a mission statement for a community and provides strategies and best practice approaches to developing one. It is quoted in this thesis to support the author's design decision to develop a mission statement for *TeachUp*.

Horton, Myles, and Paulo Freire. *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.

In this book, Myles Horton and Paulo Freire discuss how educational experiences can be used in connection with social change. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative

statements regarding the author's decision to co-design TeachUp with other members as opposed to taking a top-down leadership approach.

IDEO. *The Field Guide to Human-Centered Design*. IDEO, 2015.

<http://www.designkit.org/resources/1>

In this toolkit, designers from the IDEO design firm outline their understanding of human-centered design and offer an interactive workbook to practice exercises and strategies. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements about putting ideas into the world as a way of realizing them and assessing their effectiveness.

Jobin-Leeds, Greg and AgitArte. *When We Fight, We Win Twenty-First-Century Social Movements and the Activists That Are Transforming Our World*. New York: The New Press, 2016.

In this book, Jobin-Leeds teams up with AgitArte to create a compilation of the stories of 21st century social movements and how visual art played a role in their success. A direct quote from one of the artists, José Jorge Díaz Ortiz, is included in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the power in community and creativity to overcome alienation and solve complicated problems in society.

Kraft, Matthew A., Nicole S. Simon, and Melissa Arnold Lyon. "Sustaining a Sense of Success: The Importance of Teacher Working Conditions During the COVID-19 Pandemic".

EdWorkingPaper(2020): no. 20-279. <https://doi.org/10.26300/35nj-v890>

In this report for EdWorkingPaper, Matthew A Kraft, Nicole S. Simon, and Melissa Arnold Lyon present findings from surveys taken of educators' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and how schools might effectively respond to their concerns. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the lack of support and agency educators had throughout the crisis.

Kokil, Uttam. "The Social And Cultural Responsibilities Of Designers." Chiaroscuro Magazine.

Chiaroscuro, 2015. Accessed on April 15, 2021.

<https://www.chiaroscuromagazine.com/critique/social-and-cultural-responsibilities-designers.html>

In this article for *Chiaroscuro Magazine*, Uttam Kokil discusses the obligation designers have to ensure that their products are culturally responsible and responsive. It is quoted in this text to support narrative statements regarding the author's design considerations.

Kritzberg, Barry. "1960s: *Subversive Lesson Plans (Why I Hate Lesson Plans, On Being Fired, And Other Essays) (Subversive Essays)*" Chicago: Kritzblitz Publications, 2018. Kindle.

In this collective of essays written during his time as an educator, Barry Kritzberg muses about his opinions on lesson plans and the education system in general. It is quoted in this thesis to provide support for narrative statements regarding the forced directive of lesson plans as a tool of control for micromanaging administrators.

Lupton, Ellen, ed. 2011. *Graphic Design Thinking : Beyond Brainstorming*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press. Accessed April 15, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

In this eBook edited by Ellen Lupton, a thorough explanation of design-thinking is provided as well as a variety of strategies to engage in more meaningful brainstorming exercises. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the author's decision to use brainstorming methods as part of the design process.

Martin, James G.. "Teaching without fear." *The Learning Professional*, 41, no. 2 (April 2020).

<https://learningforward.org/journal/beyond-the-basics/teaching-without-fear/>

In this article for *The Learning Professional*, James G Martin discusses the experiences of educators who have been treated differently for speaking up and have consequently become fearful to use their voice again. It is quoted in this thesis to provide context to an article mentioned by the author.

Mortenson, Ditte. "User Research: What It Is and Why You Should Do It," Interactive Design

Foundation. Interactive Design Foundation, 2020.

<https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/user-research-what-it-is-and-why-you-should-do-it>

In this article for Interactive Design Foundation, Ditte Mortenson briefly explains the purpose and process of user research, and how it can influence a more effective product design. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the need to intentionally learn about users in order to best design a community/tool that best suits their needs.

MRT Castings. "5 Things To Know Before Creating Your Own Product." MRT Castings (blog). MRT Castings Limited, Last Modified 2017.

<https://blog.mrt-castings.co.uk/blog/5-things-to-know-before-creating-your-own-product>

In this blog post, manufacturing design firm, MRT Castings provides a quick guide for designers looking to create a new product. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the process of building off existing products and the subsequent need for prototyping in the design process.

Levinson, Meira. 2015. "Moral Injury and the Ethics of Educational Injustice." *Harvard Educational Review* 85, no. 2 (Summer): 203-228,300.

<https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/moral-injury-ethics-educational-injustice/docview/1691427600/se-2?accountid=11164>.

In this article for Harvard Educational Review, Meira Levinson uses a case study to explore the impact of the moral injury on educators when they are under professional obligation to execute directives that they believe are morally wrong. She argues that there are no effective ways for educators to fully enact justice and avoid suffering moral injury. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the trauma suffered by teachers when following directives they believe are harmful to others.

McCarthy, Christopher Jay. "Teacher Stress: Balancing Demands and Resources." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 101, no. 3 (2019): 8.

<https://kappanonline.org/teacher-stress-balancing-demands-resources-mccarthy/>

In this online article, educational psychology professor Christopher Jay McCarthy looks at the factors affecting teacher's stress. He cites a poll taken from Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) about the amount of educators who have considered leaving the profession as a result of these stressors. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements about teachers resigning and retiring due to the stress of the job.

Monteiro, Mike. *Ruined by Design: How Designers Destroyed the World, and What We Can Do to Fix It*. San Francisco: Mule Books, 2019.

In this book, designer Mike Monteiro illuminates the problems caused by intentional and unethical design. He argues that designers have an inherent responsibility to use their talents and skills to design products that make the world a better place, and protect users from harm. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the author's sense of obligation to use her design skills to evaluate and redesign harmful practices in education.

Morin, Amanda. "Dear teachers: You are also essential," Understood. Understood For All, Inc, Last Modified 2021.

<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/for-educators/universal-design-for-learning/dear-teachers-you-are-also-essential>

In this article for *Understood*, educator and parent Amanda Morin writes to affirm educators that they are doing difficult and important work during the COVID-19 pandemic, regardless of where it is taking place. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the praise of educators at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Norman, Sonya B and Shira Maguen, "Moral Injury." PTSD: National Center for PTSD. U.S.

Department of Veteran Affairs, Last Modified May 19, 2020.

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/cooccurring/moral_injury.asp

In this informative resource through the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Sonya B Norman and Dr. Shira Maguen provide an explanation of *moral injury* and its relationship with PTSD. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the author's work environment and its negative impact on her mental and physical health.

Perkiomen Valley School District, *PVSD School Board Meeting*. Perkiomen Valley School District,

February 8, 2021, video, 3:46:35. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Z5oGLj5SgA>

In this recorded board meeting at Perkiomen Valley School District, a parent makes a public comment in regards to their opinions about educator and student health risks during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the negative comments made towards educators after schools had been indefinitely shuttered due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Philips, Miklos, "COVID-19: The Ultimate Design Thinking Use Case." Toptal. Toptal, LLC, Accessed

April 11, 2021. <https://www.toptal.com/designers/experience/design-thinking-use-case>

In this article, lead designer and blog editor Philip Miklos discusses the COVID-19 as a design problem, offering ways to look at it from various perspectives and apply a human-centered approach to finding solutions. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the author's view of the pandemic as a potential opportunity to challenge harmful practices in American public education.

Schneiderman, Neil, Gail Ironson, and Scott D. Siegel. 2005. "Stress and Health: Psychological, Behavioral, and Biological Determinants." *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 1 (1): 607-628. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.1.102803.144141>.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2568977/>

In this article for the *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, Schneiderman et al look at the relationship between persistent psychosocial stressors and disease, with the implications that reduction and management of stress can influence the impact of chronic illness. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the relationship between stress and physical health.

Smiley, Amanda, "Why School Wellness Isn't Just for Kids: Many Teachers are Stressed and Depressed." *Occupational Health And Safety*. 1105 Media Incorporated, February 07, 2020. <https://ohsonline.com/articles/2020/02/07/why-school-wellness-isnt-just-for-kids-many-teachers-are-stressed-and-depressed.aspx>

In this online article, Amanda Smiley discusses the poor mental health of educators, citing both quantitative and qualitative data. It is quoted in the thesis to offer another teacher's perspective of the issue in their own words.

Sprenger, Marilee. *Social Emotional Learning and the Brain: Strategies to Help Your Students Thrive*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2020.

In this book, Marilee Sprenger uses brain science and personal experiences to discuss the ways brain-based learning can be used in relationship with social emotional learning in an educational setting. It is quoted in this thesis to provide context to narrative statements about the 2 x 10 strategy that inspired the author's approach to building community relationships.

Steinhauer, Sarah. Sarah Steinhauer to East Pennsboro Area School District Administration and School Board, Enola, PA, August 21, 2020.

This letter of resignation was written by the author of this thesis, Sarah Steinhauer. It was sent to her superintendent, principal, and school board to declare her resignation. It is quoted in this thesis to offer additional context and detail to the personal narrative.

Tschepe, Samuel. "How Design Thinking can benefit Education." Medium. Medium, May 22, 2018. <https://medium.com/swlh/how-design-thinking-can-benefit-education-2bba35450771>.

This article, written by educator Samuel Tschepe, discusses how the design-thinking mindset and approach could be used in education to meet the needs of diverse and

contemporary learners. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the author's claim that design-thinking would make a positive impact on public education.

Warren, Francesca. 2013. "The Deafening Silence of Teachers," *The Educator's Room* (blog), March 15th, 2013.

In this blog post, the creator of *The Educator's Room*, Francesca Warren, discusses the lack of freedom educators feel in expressing their opinions and experiences about their work. She makes an argument for policy makers to look to educators for decision making instead of allowing their administrators to retaliate against them for speaking honestly. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements about the fear educators have about speaking up when they recognize harmful practices or directives.

Weber, Gretchen. "Teacher Appreciation Takes on New Meaning in COVID-19 Era and Beyond," American Institutes for Research. American Institutes for Research, May 4, 2020.
<https://www.air.org/resource/teacher-appreciation-takes-new-meaning-covid-19-era-and-beyond>

In this article for the American Institutes for Research, educator and parent Gretchen Weber discusses her observations of the difficult work educators had to undertake when shifting to remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She notes that educators were praised by parents who suddenly had to become more involved in their children's education, and suggests that a real demonstration of appreciation would be to involve them in policy and

decision making at the higher level. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the praise educators received at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wu, Dengping, "Relationship Between Job Burnout And Mental Health Of Teachers Under Work Stress." *Revista Argentina de Clínica Psicológica* 29, no. 1 (2020): 314-315.

In this article for the *Revista Argentina de Clínica Psicológica*, Dengping Wu looks at the relationship between job stress, burnout and mental health among teachers through survey and analysis. He shows the correlation between them and makes the case that more attention be placed on the mental health of educators. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the negative impact job stress has on teachers' mental health.

Zhao, Yong. "Tofu Is Not Cheese: Rethinking Education Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic." *ECNU Review of Education* 3, no. 2 (June 2020): 189-203. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2096531120928082>

In this article for the *ECNU Review of Education*, Yong Zhao asserts that educators and educational leaders must accept that school buildings are closed during the COVID-19 pandemic and use this time to lean into online learning. They suggest looking at the opportunities to rethink education. It is quoted in this thesis to support narrative statements regarding the author's desires to utilize her design-thinking skills as a response to the crisis.

Appendix

A.1: Personal Testimony of Workplace Abuse



Sarah Steinhauer
December 23, 2020 · 6

Something traumatic happened to me this year that I have not talked about on a greater public level yet. I will never be fully "ready" to talk about this. At the same time, it would be neither possible nor responsible for me to never share this.

On the morning of July 16, 2020, several armed police officers from [East Pennsboro Township Police Department](#) and [Susquehanna Township Police](#) arrived at my home unexpectedly with a signed search warrant.

While my children watched, they raided my home top to bottom and aggressively accused me of committing 3 non-violent felonies. They were searching for specific clothing, a backpack, a bottle of spray paint, and a ukulele.

You see, a few days prior, someone broke into the school where I taught K-4 art, [East Pennsboro Elementary School](#), spray painted "1312" (the alphanumeric code for "All Cops Are Bastards") and stole a ukulele from the music room. They caught the suspect on surveillance tape and had put it out to the public asking for tips. I found out about the crime from a colleague who texted me. We both agreed it looked like a teenager.

On the morning of the 16th, when my vestibule was filled with armed police officers, I was informed that I was their top suspect for these crimes. They pushed their way into my home, threw photographs of the suspect in my face compared with photographs they found of me on Instagram and told me with certainty that I had done this.

I knew that I had been vocal about defunding and abolishing the police, and I was thin and blonde like the person in the surveillance video, but surely that could not be legally enough probable cause for a judge to sign a search warrant. It was also an insanely ridiculous crime that I definitely had no part in, and can't imagine any educator in the world would have done.

I asked why they were accusing me, and they gave me the warrant. The probable cause was that my building principal, Mr. Richard Tysarczyk, had informed the police that he was 95% sure that it was me in the photographs. This person who had on multiple occasions attempted to disparately discipline me and violate contract to evaluate me poorly. This person who routinely spoke of my difficult tone. This person to whom I had spoken to or informed on several occasions about the dangers of gender bias, especially when it came to strong female voices. While I do not know his motives for making such a grave accusation without any evidence, I do know that he happily announced to several staff members the day before the raid that a suspect had been found who would be charged with a serious crime.

The two lead detectives I recognized immediately when they were in my vestibule. They were the same two people who had suspiciously approached me and a parent in the parking lot of a board meeting earlier that week. They claimed to be new parents to the district and asked me what I thought about the district. I told them "I love my students." The other probable cause was that after their undercover work, they also felt I looked like the person in the surveillance photos. Surely there was no bias there when they were looking at me...surely there was no bias that the crime was anti-police and that my IG speaks about the need for police to separate from public schools.

Soon after the police arrived, I asked to go upstairs to put in a bra (since I was still in my pajamas) and to take my kids outside so they would not be frightened. I was given no time to explain to them what was happening. I was also followed upstairs where a cop watched me dress so that I would not "destroy the evidence". In that moment, I told the officer "Not only does this dehumanize me, you are now less human, too, because you truly believe you are doing the right thing."

Ben was just coming back from dropping his kids off at their mom's house. When he arrived, they pulled the man I had only married a few weeks prior outside, showed him pictures of the suspect and said "This is your wife. Go talk to her and get her to confess."

They stayed for a few hours, while my 6 and 10 year old kids sat holding one another in a chair outside, hoping everything was okay. Ben went out to check on them and a police officer followed him. I asked them to leave him alone and they said, "We can't let him go anywhere alone. There could be knives in the kitchen and he could get one and hurt us."

After they took my phone and proceeded to look at every single text message and photo they possibly could, they tricked me into seizing my phone, taking it with them, and dumping all of its data.

So you know how you are supposed to shut up when cops are around? I do know that, I swear. I know that I'm supposed to be quiet, comply, and call a lawyer immediately. But here's the thing: I couldn't. Several armed people with legal authority to kill me if they wanted to were in my home trying to convince me of doing something I didn't do. I protested, I swore at them, I told them they were not heroes and that my kids would be sure to know that when they left. I screamed at them for not keeping their masks on properly. I told them that while I had the privilege of being a white woman and not being immediately cuffed, assaulted, or murdered, that I was going to use that time to tell them every single reason they need to be defunded and abolished. I pointed out the fact that they were being paid to gear up, send two undercover officers to tail me for hours, and spend hours at my home while teachers can barely afford pencils. Why they needed several people and guns to investigate vandalism and petty theft. Why they would only have to do an ounce of research to discover that I have no history of violence, crime, and have never owned a gun. I pointed out that in taking my phone away from me for hours, that could have been my only ride to work that day if I were not more fortunate. I told them that I knew that if I were not white, this likely would have been dangerous or deadly for me and my family.

They told me they were just doing their job. They told me to be happy because if they wanted to, they could have busted down my door and tore my house apart so they were doing me a favor. I told them that I will not be made to feel grateful because they did not show me how much of a monster they could be that day.

That's the thing about trauma. This whole notion that regular people are supposed to remain calm and composed when they are being violated and endangered--its absurd. As humans we cannot magically turn off our trauma response and sympathetic nervous systems in the face of danger and harm. We are built to fight back, flee, freeze, or fawn--not stay calm. any forced suppression of that is its own kind of trauma.

When the lead detective returned with my phone hours later and said they found nothing, he said they were "ready to move on." Ben assured them that while they were ready to move on, we would not be able to move on for a long time. What had happened would change our lives forever.

I went to my union first. While my direct attorney was very helpful in walking me through the legal process of ensuring that I would not get a charge for something I obviously didn't do, I cannot say the same for the rest of the process. I asked my Uniserv rep at [PSEA - PA State Education Association](#) how I could possibly go back to a job and maintain a relationship with a superior who truly believed I was a criminal and who happily reported that I would be charged with a serious crime to my colleagues. I asked how I could continue to be an effective union representative when my fellow members saw that regularly speaking truth to my superior could lead to something like this. Their lead legal representative, Tom Scott, told me verbatim, "You need to give up on the idea that you will be able to do anything to make your work environment or school improve. That is not your job." I told him that I wanted to speak the truth about this, even if it resulted in more retaliation. He told me "I do not work with martyrs, because martyrs always end up dead." He then went on to tell me that it was my job to keep my job so I could afford to provide for my husband and children. My Uniserv rep simply stood by all this. I begged her to help me fight aggressively for justice and resolution within the district and she told me that she could not afford to damage her relationship with my superintendent because she could not afford to lose her job.

I went to a few civil lawyers. I went to reporters. They told me that because police and school districts have so much legal immunity and ammunition, that it would be a lost cause, costing more money than I had, and maybe even dangerous for me to come forward about this. They told me that because I was in a union that it would be even harder to represent me.

In 2019 I took 10 weeks of FMLA to go through partial psych hospitalization to deal with panic, anxiety, and related health problems exasperated by the abuse of public education and its authoritarian leadership. This broke me again. It wasn't just the trauma of the police violating me in my own home. It was how aggressive they were in accusing me. It was the fact that no one with any power was willing to advocate for me. Colleagues who knew about it did not feel comfortable speaking up for me. Even with the deep support and love of my family and friends, I felt a debilitating loneliness that just cannot be described. I started to question my own sanity so deeply that I began having severe panic attacks, night terrors, and even started thinking maybe I had blacked out and done it somehow (despite all the loads of evidence that I did not). I quickly became suicidal, seriously thinking that if I jumped off a bridge, maybe then someone would hear me. It was like being in a dream where I was trying to scream and no sound came out.

I retired from public education for many reasons, but this was the last straw. I would have died had I stayed-- for that I am certain. I will never again work as a public educator in America. I will continue to fight for public education, but never from inside the system again. This situation has only galvanized my commitment to working towards dismantling our education, law enforcement, and judicial systems so that we can someday realize how liberating and abundant they might be.

Public education is riddled with abusive leadership. Union leadership does not always work to protect the interests of its members first. Police officers do not always serve and protect. I knew all of these things already, only now I have first-hand evidence to prove it.

If you have gotten this far, thank you for listening. The only hope left I have of finding any semblance of justice in this situation is through telling this story and having it shared. It would be greatly appreciated if you would share it as well. If not through Facebook, then to a friend. Seriously if you ever wanted to give me a gift, this would be it. No one should ever have to endure this. At the same time, there are so many people who endure it at a much deeper and incomprehensible level.

Steinhauer, Sarah. Facebook Post, December 24, 2020.

A.2. TeachUp can be found at: www.weteachup.org and www.facebook.com/groups/weteachup

A.3: Spirit Week Facebook Posts



Sarah Steinhauer

March 1, 2019 · 🌍

Today was "Dress as Your Favorite Book Character" day. I was inspired by Shel Silverstein's "The Giving Tree". Lately I have been identifying a lot with this creature who is recognized as a valuable resource, but only by the amount of expectations placed upon it. All the while, being stripped of its gifts without the nurturing it so desperately needs to be able to produce more. Unfortunately for the tree, its desire to provide overpowers its ability to protect itself.

...and the tree was happy.

But not really.

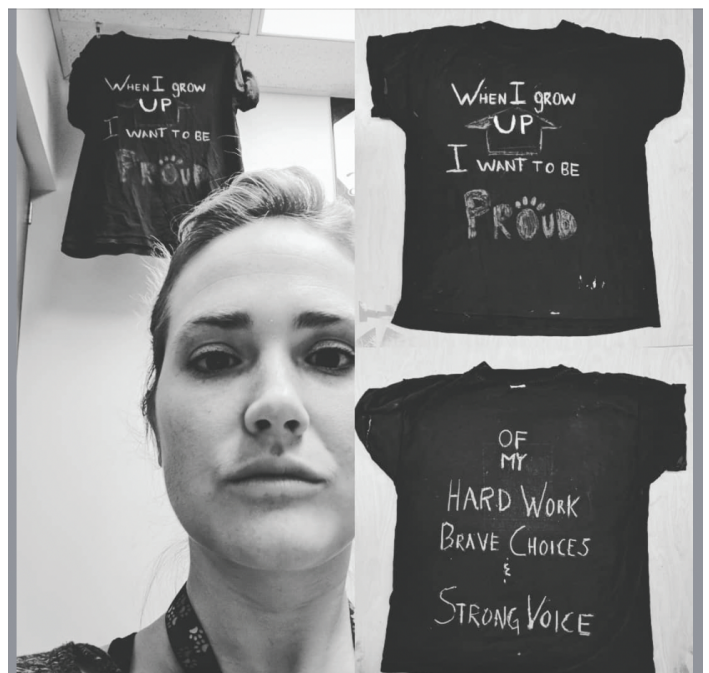
[#teachUp](#)

Sarah Steinhauer
February 26, 2019 · 🌍

Today was "Wear What You Want to Be When You Grow Up" day. I am fortunate enough to have the vocation I've always wanted to have, but that is so much less than what I am and what I want to be when I "grow up." I wanted my students to know that no matter what job they do--whether it be for duty, volunteer, career, small, big, or grandiose--at the end of the day they are successful if they are proud. Proud of putting in hard work, taking risks, asking tough questions, and using their voice to speak up for themselves and others.

[#loveyourjob](#)

[#teachUp](#)



Steinhauer, Sarah. Facebook Posts, February 28 and March 1, 2019.

A.4: #TeachUp Facebook Posts



Sarah Steinhauer

February 28, 2019 · 🌐



American public educators are in an abusive relationship of which they are afraid to leave or expose because of how much they love it, and what they hope it could be.

More thoughts to come...

[#teachUp](#)



Sarah Steinhauer

April 1, 2019 · 🌐



"From presidents to priests, the liars resist any apology, while the truth-speakers keep backing down. Speaking truth to power takes courage, and the fact that it comes out as a misspeak (as they now call these moments) does not make it a lie. Rather, it does allow us to believe that our personal wounds and image are more important than the work for change that facing the truth demands from us."

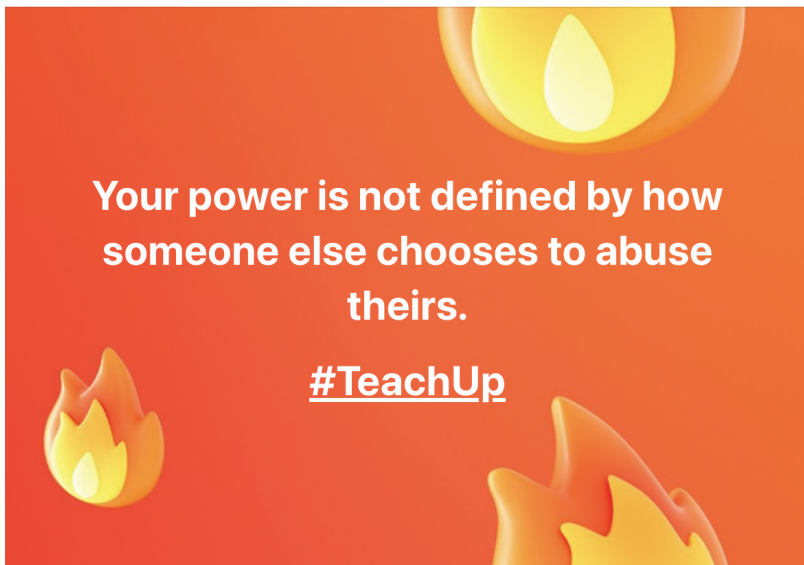
-S. Pearl Sharp

[#teachUp](#)



Sarah Steinhauer

April 15, 2019 · 🌐



Sarah Steinhauer

May 22, 2019 · 🌐



"You're making a mountain out of a molehill."

Sometimes this statement is true.

Sometimes the issue appears small because it is actually a mountain far off in the distance.

Sometimes it helps to adjust our perspective in order to see the big picture.

[#ThingsILearnedInTheArtRoom](#) [#TeachUp](#)

Steinhauer, Sarah. Facebook Posts, February 28 - May 22, 2019.

A.5: Notes from DBT Class

DBT - Week 8 - Thu - 12/5 - IE H 15/16
Dialectics Remind us that:

- The Universe is filled with opposing sides/opposing forces.
- There is always more than one way to see a situation, and more than one way to solve a problem.
- Two things that seem like opposites can both be true.
- "It is a cause, at the same time we know now, and we can use that to cause a different solution."

Look For Both Sides

- Ask Wise Mind: What am I missing? What is truth?
- Get Go of extremes either/or & both always/better
- Balance opposites. Validate both sides
- accept reality, and work to change
- embrace out of demons
- Embrace confusion
- Paradox & yes & no & five & neither
- Play Devil's Advocate: argue both sides with equal passion
- Use metaphors & storytelling to unstick & free mind

DBT - Week 8 - Thu - 12/5 - IE H 15/16
Dialectics Remind us that:

- 4. Change is transactional
- what we do influences our environment & other people in it.
- the ~~other~~ environment and other people influence us.
- Remember that you affect your environment and your environment affects you.
- Pay attention to your effect on others and how they affect you.
- Practice letting go of blame by looking for how your own and others' behaviors are caused by many interactions over time.
- Remind yourself that all things, including all behaviors, are caused.

DBT - Week 8 - Thu - 12/5 - IE H 15/16
Dialectics Remind us that:

- 2. Everything and every person is connected in some way.
- The waves and the ocean are one
- The slightest move of a butterfly affects the furthest star.

BE Aware that you are connected

- Treat others as you want them to treat you.
- Look for similarities among people instead of differences
- Notice physical connections among all things

3. Change is THE ONLY CONSTANT

- Meaning & truth evolve over time
- Each moment is new: reality itself changes with each moment

Embrace CHANGE

Throw yourself into change: Allow it, Embrace it

- Practice radical acceptance of change
- Practice getting used to change

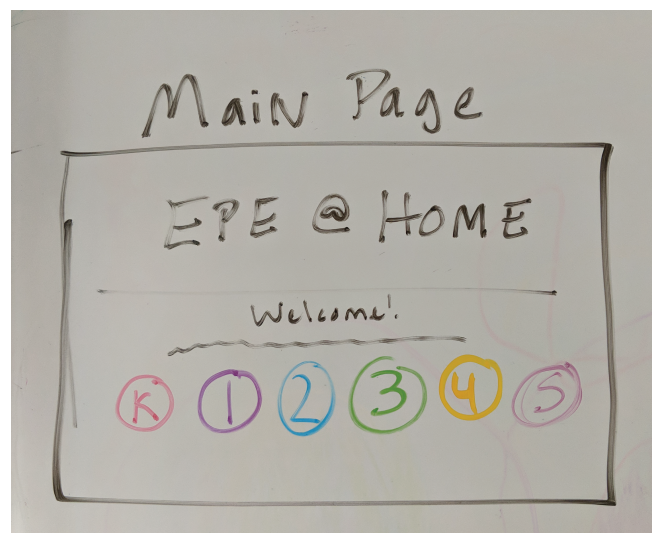
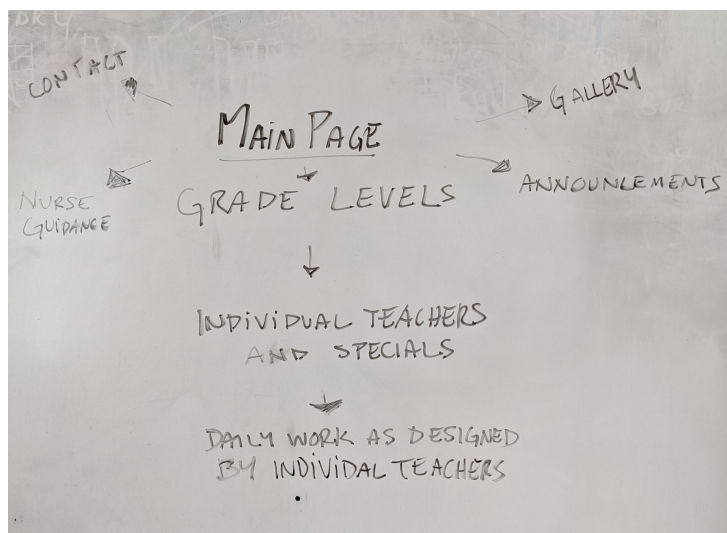
CHANGE is a loss that we often grieve it & also accepting new problems

- Adapting to external changes w/ flexibility

Notes taken when studying:

Linehan, Marsha M. "DBT Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets, Second Edition." New York: Guilford Press, 2015, Handout 15

A.6: Concept Maps and Prototypes for Remote Instruction



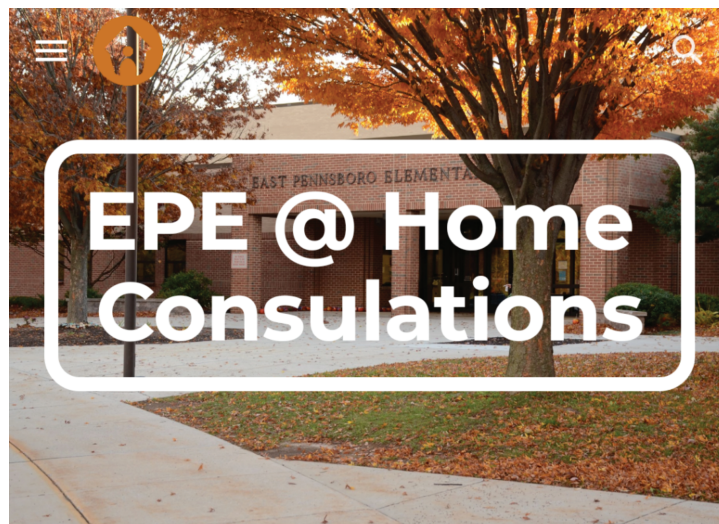
Welcome to Maker's Space!

Each day we will post a creative activity below.

Be sure to check out the growing list of free online creative resources, too!

FREE ONLINE CREATIVE
RESOURCES

CLICK DATES BELOW FOR DAILY PROMPTS



Schedule a meeting with Ms. Steinhauer to discuss ways that you can help your kiddos learn at home!

Steinhauer, Sarah. Photos of whiteboard concept maps and screenshots of digital prototypes

A.7: TeachUp Group Description



Sarah Ann updated the description.



Admin • May 22 at 9:25 PM • 📷

TeachUp is a group dedicated to developing a community of educators who are empowered to use their voices and be heard. Here you are invited to speak difficult truths about the system and culture of education. This is not a group for only hugs, hearts, and "my thoughts are with you." Here you can expect honest, clear, and actionable feedback.

If you are the lone wolf teacher who is always speaking up, here is where you can find the support you might be missing. If you are a teacher who would like to speak up, but fear the fallout, here is where you can find your strong voice. If you are a teacher who cannot stand that one faculty member who is always speaking up, here is where you can both work towards mutual understanding and respect.

"If you can't hear me, then you can't see me" -Tarana Burke.

You became a teacher because it was your calling, and you have the right to call out when things are not acceptable. Let's use this space together to be seen.

Steinhauer, Sarah. *TeachUp* Facebook Group Description, May 22, 2020.

A.8: TeachUp Community Guidelines

Group Rules



1 Keep it Relevant



Please read the description of the group to see what we're here for. There are other teachers groups dedicated to funny memes, everyday questions, and teacher tips. We're here for the bigger picture.

2 No empty complaints or forced positivity



This isn't the faculty lounge. If something sucks, you deserve to say that, and we're here to help you understand and change it. It is not "just the way it is," so be ready for actionable feedback.

3 Work together to find the right words



We want our words to reflect our true voice rather than a lack of vocabulary. We don't always choose the best ones right away, so if you don't like someone's words, offer curiosity before judgement.

← Membership Questions

Questions

QUESTION 1

Do you currently or have you ever worked in the field of education?



QUESTION 2

Are you open to viewing and/or participating in meaningful and effective conversations about education, even if it challenges your comfort level?



QUESTION 3

Are you open to critical thought and feedback?



Group Rules

Include your group rules and ask pending members to select that they agree to them.



Steinhauer, Sarah. *TeachUp* Facebook Group Community Guidelines and Entry Questions, May 22, 2020.

A.9. To see all 2 minute “TeachUp Vlog Talks” visit:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9UCB5pQ80kvV1uY_hzfS78NqJOBIPhYf

A.10: Spirit Week Facebook Posts



Sarah Ann ▶ TeachUp



May 21 at 3:35 PM • 📷



Steinhauer, Sarah. Facebook Post, May 21, 2019.

A.11: TeachUp Style Guide

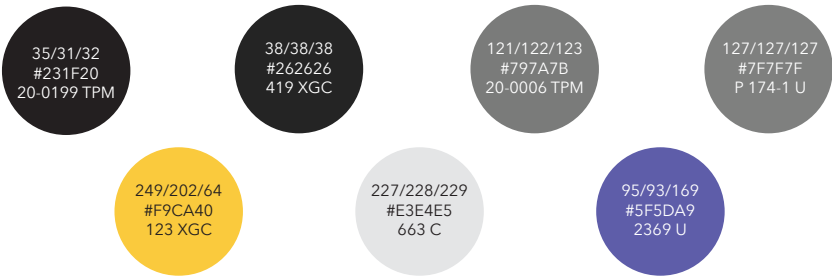
PRIMARY LOGO



LOGO VARIATIONS



COLORS (All RGB)

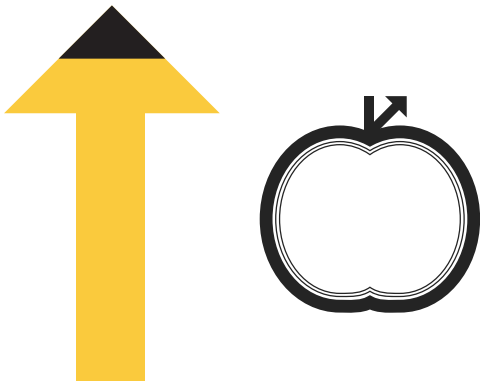


FONTS

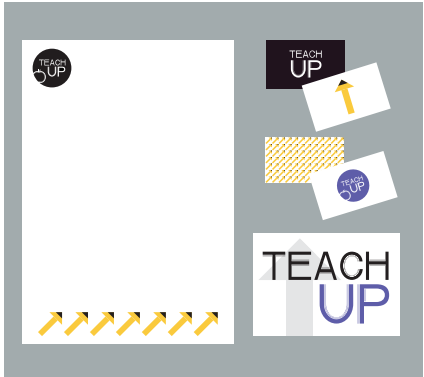
HEADLINE FONT: AVENUEX
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789

COPY FONT: COURIER
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789

OTHER GRAPHICS



USAGE EXAMPLES

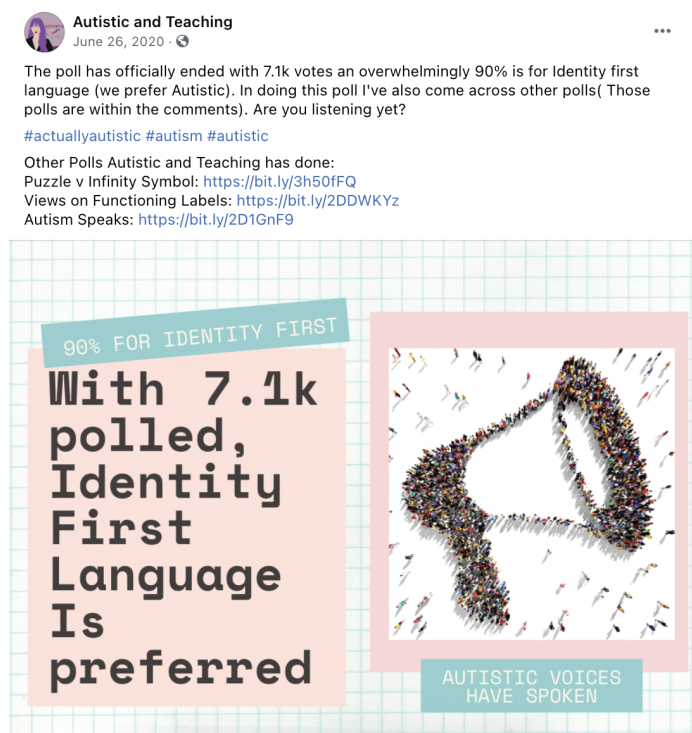


TEXTURES



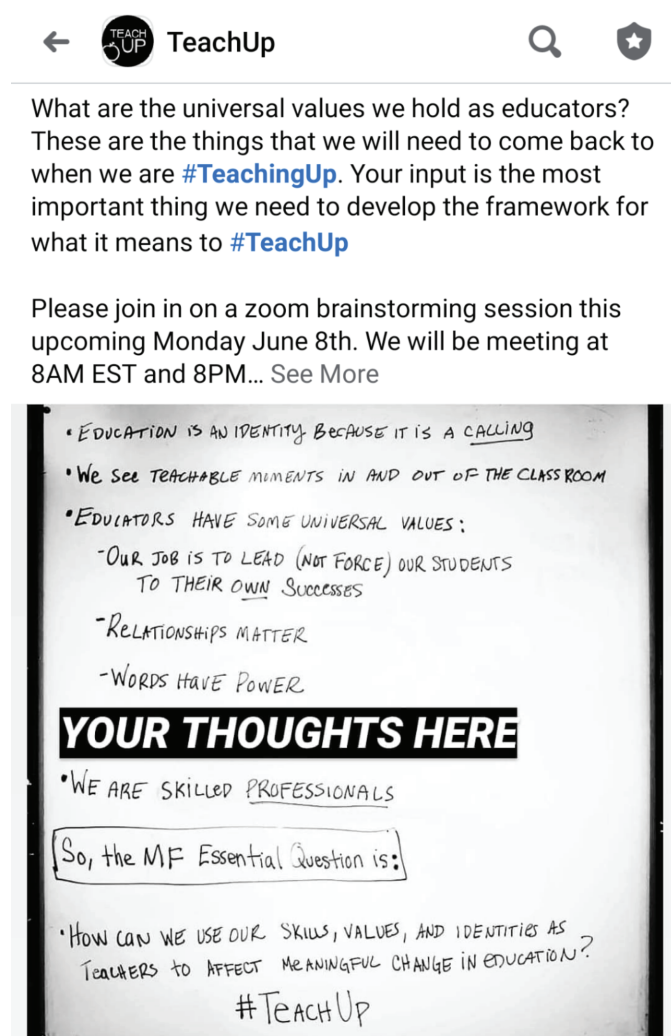
Steinhauer, Sarah. TeachUp Style Guide,
June, 2020

A.12: Autistic and Teaching Poll



Autistic and Teaching, Facebook Post, June 26, 2020. Used with Permission

A.13: Brainstorming Facebook Post



Steinhauer Sarah, Facebook Post, June 6, 2020

TEACH UP - WHAT'S OUR MISSION?

EMPOWERING Essential Question (EEQ):

How can we use our values, skills, and identities as teachers to educate upwardly and affect meaningful change?

Who: Educators

What: community with resources and support

Where: virtual

Why: personal empowerment and advocacy

How: through an education-first approach

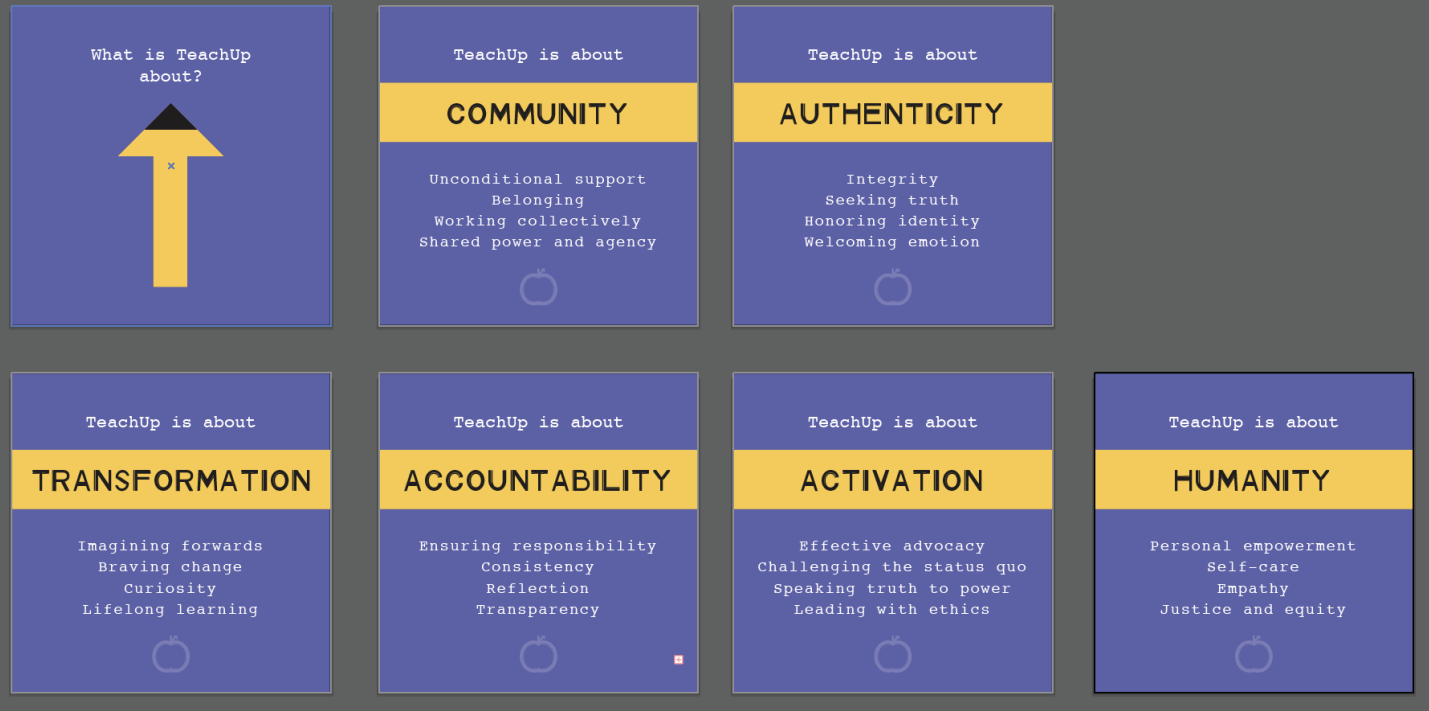
TeachUp is a virtual community for educators that provides resources and support for personal empowerment and advocacy for meaningful change.

TeachUp is a virtual community that provides resources and support to educators seeking personal empowerment and

TeachUp is a virtual community of educators seeking resources and support for personal empowerment and effective advocacy.

TeachUp Community. Mission
Statement Exercise, July 1, 2020

A.15: TeachUp Foundations



Steinhauer, Sarah and TeachUp Community.
TeachUp Foundations, July 22, 2020

MEETUP AGREEMENTS

Below are some *collective* “norms” we have co-developed to communicate for shared growth.

- **We are all teachers and students**
(We all have things to share and things to learn)
- **Be mindful that this is OUR space**
(We are co-creating/Avoid crosstalk)
- **Honor identities, protect confidentiality**
(Welcoming our authentic selves/leave personal details here)
- **Accountable and Actionable talk > debate or complaint**
(Finding common truth > winning an argument
Venting is totally fine, be prepared for solutions and feedback)
- **Be conscious of time (Step Up/Step Back)**
- **Unfinished Business and Follow-Up**

TeachUp Community. TeachUp Meeting Agreements, July 23, 2020 - Present

A.17: Virtual Whiteboards

What is Effective Advocacy?

Empathy

How to advocate as a person with less power?
(Institutionally or societally)

Planting seeds

Relating self-advocacy to the expectations for how we approach our students

What to do about real or perceived reactions to advocacy?

Calculated risk

Strength in numbers

Multiple pathways to advocacy (email, board mtgs, union, convos, surveys, other)

Advocating for transparency so that we can be informed

What is available to us to be involved and advocate?

Concerted action steps

HOW CAN YOU USE YOUR VALUES AND SKILLS AS AN EDUCATOR TO ADVOCATE?

HOW CAN YOU "TEACHUP"?

How do teachers define experiencing professional abuse in the workplace?

What does abuse look like?

- Expectations placed on teachers and students are abusive for both
 - Having to follow a script or teach specific content on a tight or controlled schedule
 - Feels invalidating
 - Creates a lack of trust
 - Creates unnecessary pressure
 - Discourages creativity and professional autonomy
 - Doing work that doesn't align with your values is moral injury
- High stakes testing
 - Pressure to teach only specific things
 - Having to teach to the test and subjects children to inappropriate learning expectations
- Risk of job loss or loss of resources if tests scores are not good

How are teachers drawing the line to redefine education?

- **Appropriate** class sizes. Setting limits beginning with K and moving upwards.
- **Equity in discipline, leadership, faculty presence, curriculum, and procedures/policies**
- Having **certified building subs** that can be transferred to classroom teachers if they need to open up another room because of higher enrollment
- **Lead teacher/co-teacher/class aide model**
- **Include early childhood as part of the public education program**
- **SEL 1:1 support availability**
- **Mental health supports and consideration**

The screenshot shows a virtual whiteboard interface with two discussion threads. Each thread includes a user profile (George Czar), a timestamp (Aug 27, 2020), and a text input area. The first thread discusses the definition of 'appropriate' class sizes, and the second thread discusses substitutes and their compensation.

George Czar ✓

I agree, but how would we define what "appropriate" is? I would advocate for something that reflects where we are
[Show more](#)

From imported document

Teach Up
Aug 27, 2020

This is a very good thought. It would be difficult to pin down and would have many different dependencies.

George Czar ✓

Substitutes should enjoy either higher pay or higher prestige, as well. Maybe require schools with a certain amount of staff to be required to higher a set number of certified building subs that can fill in where needed. But give them contracts, salary, and benefits, too.

TeachUp Community, Virtual Whiteboards,
June - July, 2020.



Steinhauer, Sarah. AfterTalk Venting Session,
November 24, 2020.