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The Negative Effect Labeling has on Students' Relationships with Education

A Thesis in the Field of Education

For the Degree of Master of Science in Education

Art of Teaching Program

Sarah Lawrence College

Mikayla Cunningham

May, 2021

Abstract

Labeling students is a common practice in modern education but it is harmful to the relationship between the student and their learning process. I will first provide a clear definition and provide examples of labeling. I will show however innocuous or scientific a label may seem, it can have detrimental, lingering negative effects on a child's relationship with their schooling. I will then demonstrate through real-life case studies the experience of students that have both been labeled and have not been labeled, showing the exact labels that were applied to the students, their educational progress, and how the labeling directly impacted such. I propose that a deeper knowledge of the students as a whole will enable educators to provide a more holistic and encouraging environment for all students. Education that takes into account the various traits and qualities of a child without creating a preconceived notion in the minds of teachers, administrators, parents and other students will be a more equal, beneficial form of pedagogy for all involved.

Acknowledgements

I was fortunate enough to receive a tremendous amount of support and for this I am very grateful. I would like to thank my professors Patricia Virella and Rue Beckerman for their patience, guidance, and understanding. Without them I would not have the confidence and skills required to become an educator. I would also like to thank Pamela Tanenbaum, Lorayne Carbon, and Denisha Jones for all of their support and showing me grace in this trying time.

I want to extend my gratitude to my youngest brother for teaching me patience, compassion, and to always think outside the box. It is because of him, that I am determined to make sure every child is seen as much more than a label.

A special thank you to my mother and fiancé for listening to all my theories and allowing me to bounce information off them constantly. I am blessed to have such a wonderful support system and without them this thesis would not be possible.

Annotated Outline

Thesis: While some argue labeling can simplify a teacher's evaluation of their students, labeling creates a detrimental effect on students' relationships with education. Students who have been labeled become outsiders in their own classrooms. We expect them to adapt to classroom curriculum instead of adapting the curriculum to edify the students. By allowing this to continue, the education system is further cultivating a culture ruled by stigmatism and conformity.

Supporting Evidence:

- *Troublemakers* by Carla Shalaby
 - The repetition of diagnosis within the classroom
 - ADHD being a catchall of the staff
 - Invisibility versus inclusion
 - Pretending that excluding one child will be for the greater good of all the students
 - Classroom community
- *The Deepest Well* by Nadine Burke Harris
 - ACEs
 - Knowing that students bring more than just a diagnosis
 - How life plays into the classroom
 - Children have multiple identities; educators need to know who the students are and what feelings/emotions students bring into the classroom.
 - Knowing your student is the most important part of educating
- *One Child* by Torey Hayden
 - Focuses on one student. Educator was told by the administration that she was beyond control.
 - Ms. Hayden knew to look beyond the label and see the student for who they are.
 - The Little Prince?
 - The idea of taming?
- Emergent Curriculum Conference Paper
 - Different methods each student has for learning
 - Student narratives about being labeled
 - Time lapse?
 - Viewing the relationship now after two years.
 - How teachers view labels
- *Levels in the Library* by Alyson Rumberger
 - the students are aware of their placements

Introduction:

- Narrative
 - By the age of six years old the following children had already been labeled, some to the extreme, and were at a disadvantage

- I want everyone to stop for a minute and really think back to when you were six:
 - Do you remember feeling like you could do anything?
 - Do you remember what you wanted to be growing up?
 - Think about how school made you feel...
 - Personally, I loved school every single day. However, the three students I'm going to talk about next were not given the same chance and for them that excitement, the feeling of being able to accomplish anything, was ripped from them before they ever even understood what had happened.
- Ethan
 - When the labeling started
 - In kindergarten Ethan was hyperactive and always on the move
 - Traditional schooling
 - He was five.
 - This was his first interaction with school and within weeks he was classified as troublesome.
 - This would follow him throughout school, all the way until sixth grade.
 - Switched to Online School
 - First Grade teacher made a difference and stuck her neck out for him
 - He would often get sent to her class to “calm down” well after 1st grade.
 - Why the label came about
 - His teacher was an older woman who retired a year after Ethan.
 - He was hyperactive
 - Had a hard time sitting down
 - Transitions were frustrating.
 - What happened to his relationship with education?
 - He switched schools in the fourth grade, and it seemed as though he was finally in a place that saw past the label he had been given.
 - Unfortunately, he was forced to move and ended up at a school that was worse than his original school.
 - Because he had a problem with transitions, they would make him leave class five minutes before class got out. He would have to wait in the office until the next class had started and then he would leave the office, get his things and then head to the next class late.
 - They moved him to isolated learning.
 - They moved him to a half day where he would come to school in the morning. He would spend three hours in the office doing core curriculum classes and then would have to be picked up by 11:30.

- He wouldn't do the homework but would score high 90s on every test he had.
 - Proving he wasn't being challenged thus resulting in acting out.

- Long term
 - He hated going to school.
 - Some of the behaviors that are behind Ethan's labeling
 - Sitting still is a requirement and it's one that Ethan hasn't yet mastered. However, looking deeper, it was easy to see this outlet of energy occurs when he is deep in thought. When he has an idea, it is one that he feels the need to act on immediately, it appears as though he is constantly distracted.
 - Ethan moves on to things quickly, whether the task is finished or not. He likes to be active. He bounces his feet when he's sitting down, at the kitchen chair, on the sofa, or at the desk. A behavior that could be very distracting in a classroom setting. It's one of the first things you notice. He gets really involved in the task he's working on. His focus is on the one thing in his mind and that's what he needs to be doing. This focus changes quickly however, and this creates a problem in the traditional classroom setting. He leaves tasks unfinished because of this focus shift. It's difficult to get him to finish his meals, let alone an assignment, in one sitting. Over the course of time, I was able to watch him come back and finish the task, but it was on his terms.
 - He had an extremely hard time making friends and socializing.
 - He has bad social anxiety and prefers to stay home when given the opportunity.
 - His mother ended up pulling him out of school and moving him to online learning
 - By this time however he no longer felt like school was a place meant to encourage him to learn and grow but rather a place he was required to attend that did not care about his wellbeing.
 - This became too overwhelming for him and he stopped attending.
 - He went on to get his GED but his relationship with school created long term problems.

- Carson
 - Similar circumstances to Ethan but without the label

- He was young as well
 - Very active
 - Hard time with transitions
 - Initiating social interaction was a somewhat difficult task
- Type of school attended
 - He was at the ECC
- Does the environment make a difference?
 - The school he attended had a philosophy of seeing the children for more than their behavior
 - The teachers knew how to work on these behaviors that would be considered troublesome if you didn't understand why they were happening.
 - What we did:
 - Making transitions clearer for the whole class
 - Alerting the class when it was 5 minutes before we switched tasks and then again at one minute.
 - Finding a way to make space for more activity time in the classroom
 - Playing instruments and dancing
 - Making an obstacle course in the free room
 - Heading outside earlier on days when the classroom energy was high
 - Suggesting to his parents to have play dates with other students in the class.
 - We understood that Carson was a complex human with complex emotions.
 - We let him know he was seen and heard
 - Working together on making this experience something he enjoyed
- Short term knowledge
 - Within the year Carson possessed a much healthier attitude surrounding school.
 - The play dates allowed him to have more social interaction and because of this he blossomed in the classroom
 - Showing him appropriate ways to release his energy created a space where he could find his bearings
 - He had a better understanding of transitions and would often help us sing the song and let the other children know it was time to pick up their things and switch gears.
- Sheila
 - Started off with a BIG label
 - The label came from outside the educational world

- Knowing that she was coming into the classroom with so much baggage and trying to solve that without crossing Sheila's boundaries.
- How the teacher ignored that aspect
 - Ms. Hayden did her research before Sheila entered the room.
 - Allowed her to have some background information but not judgement
- What that did for their relationship and thus Sheila's relationship with education
- Learning to walk the line
 - Knowing what to take from a label and how to make sure the students do not fall through the cracks.
 - "I taught what was affectionately referred to our school district as the 'garbage class'" (Hayden, 1980, p. 5).
 - the last stop before an institution
 - None of the other teachers wanted her and none of the parents thought she should even be attending school.

Body:

- What does labeling look like?
 - "As a noun, a troublemaker is a kind of person -- an identity encoded in and imprinted on individual bodies. It locates the problem of noncompliance in people, fogging our view of the social and cultural production of trouble. By contrast we can instead treat *trouble-making* as a verb -- a process, an action, a system" (Shalaby, 2017, p. 151).
- For the students
 - Who has been labeled?
 - The children who are hyperactive
 - The children who struggle to stay focused
 - "Young students learn best by interacting with the world around them" (Resnick, 2017, p. 7).
 - The children who don't fit the cookie cutter mold that's been created
 - "Instead of asking children to constantly adapt to the methods of teachers, teachers are asked to adapt themselves to the needs and interests of their students" (Ruen, 2010, p. 44).
 - Anyone that "tests" their teachers
 - Who is watching others fall into that category?
 - Other students see these "negative" characteristics and begin to understand their place in the classroom is contingent

- When the students know the children that have been labeled and go out of their way to make them the outcast of the classroom.
 - Zora in *Troublemakers*: Everyone would try to get her in trouble even when she wasn't really doing anything wrong
 - This culture allows students not labeled as troubling to have a false sense of authority and be able to police the other students.
 - “Belonging to the classroom community is conditional, not absolute, contingent upon their willingness and ability to be a certain kind of person” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 162).
 - Allowing the other students to police students that misbehave.
 - Creating a negative classroom community under the guise of creating an inclusive classroom.
 - For the teachers
 - Who did the labeling?
 - Past teachers
 - “Any teacher who rigidly adheres to the routines set forth in teaching manuals is exercising authority in a way that inhibits the freedom of students” (Freire, 1987, p. 214).
 - “Children are extremely sensitive to teachers who do exactly the opposite of what they say” (Freire, 2005, p.70).
 - Knowing their reasoning
 - “She was, Mrs. Baruthuly admitted, the closest thing to an unteachable child she had ever encountered” (Hayden, 1980, p. 52).
 - Knowing how they are with all their students
 - Being aware of how that teacher conducts her classroom and is with her students
 - Understanding their reasoning behind the label
 - For those that teach after the students have been affected
 - The bias already being there before the student has even been met.
 - The students never get a chance to defend themselves.
- How to mend the feelings associated with labels
 - Whose job is it?
 - “Once again, it seems to me, being aware of the various kinds of beliefs we want to develop can help us in our decisions about how to go about our job” (Duckworth, 2006, p. 59).
 - We are all responsible to take the negative away
 - Stopping the labeling at the source
 - Making more space for differences
 - Becoming LOVE
 - “What is central is the child and his work, not external standards or curriculum” (Ruen, 2010, p. 43).
 - Better Teacher Reaction on Discipline
 - Discipline rather than punishes
 - Restoring community rather than excluding community.

- “If you be love, as a teacher, then what you model is the belief -- through the everyday things you do -- that no human being deserves to suffer any threat to or assault on her personhood. It means that even in the face of a young person constantly calling out, cursing you out, or throwing a chair, you be love in a response that disciplines rather than punishes. You beloved by modeling healing over harm. You be love by restoring community instead of excluding from community” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 172).
- How can everybody help
 - What is required on the part of the teacher?
 - “I found establishing a structure a useful and productive method with all the children because it erased the fuzziness of our relationship” (Hayden, 1980, p. 27).
 - “Another testimony that should not be missing from our relationship with students is the testimony of our constant commitment to justice, liberty, and individual right, of our dedication to defending the weakest when they are subjected to the exploitation of the strongest” (Freire, 2005, p. 71).
 - “Our job is not exhausted in the teaching of math, geography, syntax, history. Our job implies that we teach these subjects with sobriety and competence, but it also requires our involvement in and dedication to overcoming social injustice” (Freire, 2005, p. 73).
 - Changing the way, we view labels
 - “These alternate images allow us to view children as complex and beautiful human beings rather than caricatures of *troublemakers*. Their humanness encourages us to try to understand their difficult behavior through a more generous lens – a lens that treats *troublemaker* as a verb rather than a noun” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 151).
 - Knowing that the child is separate from the actions
 - Being aware that all actions stem from a source of complex emotion the child is trying to understand.
 - Insecurity can cause an emotional reaction that results in fearful overcompensation. (Freire, 2005)
 - Functions of behavior as a deeper reasoning (Milestones, 2021).
 - Sensory: finds the behavior satisfying or soothing
 - Escape: wants to get out of their current situation
 - Attention: desire for the undivided attention of a parent, teacher, or other person
 - Tangible: the desire for attaining a particular object

- Long Term effects of negative relationship with education
 - What that means for students who are labeled young
 - Teachers are often aware of the label before they even met the student
 - It's their first interaction with the student and they aren't there to defend themselves
 - "All too often, the language of assessment follows students into those spaces designed to be assessment-free" (Rumberger, 2018, p.58).
 - How to break the mold
 - Knowing the child for their many identities not just their school identity
 - Being aware of their complex persona
 - "The grading rubric both narrowed my view of Sam and failed to support his own development" (Howes, 2014, p.52).
 - Allowing the students to be let the personality they have grow
 - "That desire, the human longing to make sense of the world and our own place within it, fuels a driving force in the world – a force with very real consequences for good or for ill. I am saying that it is a passion no less strong than other human passions. I am saying that we humans are philosophers by nature. Children are no exception" (Carini & Himley, 2010, p. 155).
 - Children are perfectly capable of being who they are. It is our job to make sure that passion doesn't get put out. Doing no harm
 - "For the school to do no harm. For each of us to be the equal of the other. For each child's well-being to be valued as highly as we value our own or that of the child closest to our heart. For the child's essential humanness to be the starting point for education. For the child to be the harbinger of human possibility. For the child's dignity to be the school's first responsibility and guiding principle." (Carini & Himley, 2010, p. 7).
 - The Deepest Well
- The importance of knowing the student as themselves
 - Ways of knowing
 - Using the descriptive review process to grasp knowledge of the child as a whole.
 - What this can mean for students who would have previously been labeled
 - "Teaching toward wholeness is a commitment by the teacher to view each child as a whole person who is in the process of change and growth and to create a classroom environment that supports the many ways that children grow" (Ruen, 2010, p. 42).

- “This school identity can seem to be their only identity if we fail to account for who they are in the many other parts of their lives—daughters and sons, martial artists and basketball players, poets and artists, experts and natural learners” (Shalaby, 2017 p. 151).
- These students should be afforded individualism
 - Being more than an extension of the classroom
 - “Every child is born with immense natural talents. How they develop has much to do with the environment in which they are raised and the opportunities they are given. Education should be among the best of those opportunities” (Resnick, 2017, p. ix).
- Patricia Carini
 - “Through these windows it is possible to glimpse how a child goes about making sense of the world and her or his own experience” (Himley and Carini, 2000, p. 61).
 - The descriptive review process
 - Physical Presence and Gesture
 - Disposition and Temperament
 - Connections with Other People
 - Strong Interests and Preferences
 - Modes of Thinking and Learning
 - Implications for Teaching
 - What this means for the students that have been labeled
 - The importance of knowing emotions are a reaction but are not the only way to understand the child for who they are
 - The idea that “normal” exists and is something to be achieved
 - “That is what scares me – the ease with which we become agents of norms. The insidious and everyday ways that norms capture us, fasten us all too securely within them, squelch our aesthetic and ethical desire to be a certain kind of person, and cause us to disavow our capacity for finding our bass line and making a difference” (Carini & Himley, p. 151).

Conclusion:

- As educators it is our job to do better by these students.
 - In every aspect of the school; educators, assistants, office staff and administrators.
 - Becoming Love
 - “Without the democratic intervention of the educator, there is no progressive education” (Freire, 2005, p. 72).
 - “Our relationship with the learners demands that we respect them and demands equally that we be aware of the concrete conditions of their world, the conditions that shape them. To try to know the reality that our students live is a task that the educational practice imposes on us: Without this, we have no access to the way they think, so only with great difficulty can we perceive what and how they know” (Freire, 2005, p. 72).
 - Settling Positive Examples

- It is the job of the teachers to create environments in which the students flourish the best. (Resnick, 2017)
- Inclusion vs Exclusion
 - Community classrooms
- How our interventions can be the making or breaking point for students
 - As adults we have a hard time with constant reprimand how do we expect children to be any different
- Knowing the student is the most important task we as teachers need to accomplish
 - Ways of knowing the students
 - Retouch on Patricia Carini
- My Future Practice
 - What I will do in the classroom
 - What I want it to look like
 - It became clear to me that I would do whatever necessary to make sure these students had the freedom to be who they are. I will trust their desires and emotions to be the driving force behind their educational journey. There will be no power hungry educator demanding compliance in return for being seen. There will be no outcasts, no “bad” students, no “troublemakers” within the four walls of my classroom. It was no longer just about hypothetical children, these children are our family, friends, and they will be the little faces in our classrooms. It is our duty to make sure we do not let these students fall through the crack. We must be the educators who create room for these students, who show compassion and understanding, and hold our colleges to a higher standard.

Quotes

One Child By Torey Hayden

- “I should have known that no teacher would want a six-year-old with that background in his or her classroom. No parent would want a child like that attending school with his or her child. No one would want that kid loose” (Hayden, 1980, p. 5).
- “I taught what was affectionately referred to our school district as the ‘garbage class’” (Hayden, p. 5).
- “I was the last stop before institution” (Hayden, 1980, p. 5).
- “I found establishing a structure a useful and productive method with all the children because it erased the fuzziness of our relationship” (Hayden, 1980, p. 27).
- “Sheila knew why she was there. From the second day on she continued to refer to us affectionately as a ‘crazy class.’ And she was a crazy kid who did bad things.” (Hayden, 1980, p. 46)
- “She was, Mrs. Baruthuly admitted, the closest thing to an unteachable child she had ever encountered” (Hayden, 1980, p. 52).
- “I can never understand what it is about being human that allows one to become fixed on small matters and think the world will collapse if things don’t go just the way one wants them” (Hayden, 1980, p. 52).
- “If they sent her out of school, suspended her, she wouldn’t come back” (Hayden, 1980, p. 56).

Troublemakers: Lesson in Freedom from Young Children at School by Carla Shalaby

- “The troublemakers are the caged canaries, children who are more sensitive than their peers to the toxic environment of the classroom that limits their freedom clips their wings and mutes their voices. The Canaries’ songs warns us of the dangers -- dangers to children's learning and development, to their self-worth, to their physical health and emotional well-being -- as the misbehaving children struggle for visibility and voice in an institution that works to ensure their invisibility; as they work to be embraced by their classroom communities but behave in such a way that will ensure their exclusion; as they seek interdependence in a setting where the norms of independence prevail as they raised their voices louder and louder hoping to be heard but know they will be silenced” (Shalaby, 2017, p. xiii-xiv).
- “I think of children who make trouble at school as minors Canaries. I want us to imagine their behaviors-- which are adamantly disruptive, hyper, visible and problematic-- as both the loud sound of their suffering and a signal cry to the rest of us that there is poison in our shared air” (Shalaby, 2017, p. xxi).
- “As a noun, a troublemaker is a kind of person -- an identity encoded in and imprinted on individual bodies. It locates the problem of noncompliance in people, fogging our view of the social and cultural production of trouble. By contrast we can instead treat *troublemaking* as a verb -- a process, an action, a system” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 151).
- “Schools are particularly harmful institutions for young people. Trouble gets made because schools engender it, exclude it, and ultimately work hard to simply erase it.

Schools try to make trouble invisible, most often by attempting to eliminate the young people who are working so hard to make it visible” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 152).

- “These children become outcast marginally marginalization is the punishment for refusing to conform to the mainstream” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 152).
- “The hope is to eliminate noncompliance, to make misbehavior disappear, and this requires that problem children themselves be rendered invisible” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 152).
- “But schools make people. In the everyday work of the classrooms, social identities are fomented and cemented in the minds and bodies of young people. This is active political work, cultural work -- not neutral, passive work” (Shalaby, 2017, p.153).
- “Children who fail to follow the rules get flagged, punished, diagnosed, remediated. They get to be another kind of person -- a bad person, a failing student, a problem child, a marginalized member of the community. No child is naturally a troublemaker. A child is who she is -- and when she walks through the school doors and interacts with its arrangements in rules, its requirements and demands, she may find herself in trouble if she challenges and refuses the power of the school to make her into a conforming, self-regulating, and self-disciplining person. It is in this interaction between child and school that trouble is made” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 154).
- “Zora is too different -- loud, active, unruly, bossy, noncompliant. Of course, her parents don't necessarily find these qualities problematic. Indeed, these are qualities often associated with leadership and with groundbreaking boldness” (Shalaby,2017, p. 155).
- “Marcus rejects the framing of the teacher-student relationship as a dynamic of adult power over children. He reframes the relationship as one in which older folks are supposed to help and support young folks” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 158).
- “His troublemaker identity is so overpowering that it renders his fundamental humanness invisible” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 159).
- “School is trying to make people, but these young people insist they are already made. Their families, their communities, their histories, their biology, their preferences, make these children distinctive people already -- people with ways of being that happened to be misunderstood, undervalued, and ultimately unwelcome in school” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 159).
- “These children have barely been alive seven years and already they have been identified as problems” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 159).
- “These children risked punishment, risked the relationships with the teacher, to carve out a threat of belonging in the social fabric of the classroom. Assigned troublemaker identities, they worked within those identities to do this work of attempted inclusion” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 161).
- “It isn't the behavior of the children that threatens community it is the response to that behavior, the use of exclusion, that threatens community” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 162).
- “Getting in trouble is worth the risk if the result is a momentary sense of belonging, some fleeting relief from the deep loneliness of being different and being left out” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 165).
- “Feeling invisible, unheard, unseen, unrecognized made the children more fiercely insist on drawing attention to themselves. But, of course, their efforts were often wildly inappropriate, ensuring that nobody could possibly pretend not to see them” (Shalaby,2017, p. 167).

- “They want to speak, not just listen. They want to play, not just work period they want to perform, not just sit in the audience. They want to stand out, not fit in. They want to be teachers, not just learners. They want to be known and seen as children, not just students. They are reminding teachers to teach people, not content” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 167).
- “Understanding disruption and transgression as one language children speak helps to reframe misbehavior as an expression of a set of demands -- a strategy for being heard and seen” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 168).
- “These children are examples of the power of disruption. They disrupt the expectation of conformity, boldly and brazenly wearing their difference and their creativity. They disrupt the demand for compliance, questioning and challenging and negotiating authority. They disrupt the requirement for quiet and stillness, fiercely insisting on their right to people seen and heard. They disrupt too-narrow definitions of what it means to be good, leveraging their assigned identities as troublemakers in the fight for permission to forge identities of their own choosing” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 169).
- “If you be love, as a teacher, then what you model is the belief -- through the everyday things you do -- that no human being deserves to suffer any threat to or assault on her personhood. It means that even in the face of a young person constantly calling out, cursing you out, or throwing a chair, you be love in a response that disciplines rather than punishes. You beloved by modeling healing over harm. You be love by restoring community instead of excluding from community” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 172).
- “The point is to model a response to troublemakers that values inclusion over exclusion and that understands behavior as a social problem rather than just an individual one” (Shalaby, 2017, p. 177-178).

The Deepest Well By Nadine Burke-Harris

- “Diego’s school nurse had referred him for evaluation for attention deficit hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity. Whether or not Diego was one of the millions of children affected by ADHD remained to be seen” (Burke-Harris, 2019, p. 4).
- “It started with the glut of ADHD cases that were referred to me. As with Diego’s, most of my patients’ ADHD symptoms didn’t just come out of the blue. They seemed to occur at the highest rates in patients that who were struggling with some type of life disruption or trauma, like the twins who were failing classes and getting into fights at school after witnessing an attempted murder in their home or the three brothers whose grades fell precipitously after their parents’ divorce violently acrimonious, to the point where the family was ordered by the court to do their custody swamps at the Bayview police station” (Burke-Harris, 2019, p. 5).
- “Many patients were already on ADHD medication: some were even on antipsychotics. For a number of patients, the medication seemed to be helping, but for many it clearly wasn’t. Most of the time I couldn’t make the ADHD diagnosis. The diagnostic criteria for ADHD told me I had to rule out other explanations for ADHD symptoms (such as pervasive developmental disorders, schizophrenia, or other psychotic disorders) before I could diagnose ADHD” (Burke-Harris, 2019, p. 5).
- “With Trinity’s complaint of learning and behavior problems, if her ACE score had been zero, a standard ADHD workup would have been warranted. But now I knew that if a patient had four or more ACEs, she was thirty-two times as likely to have learning or behavior problems” (Burke-Harris, 2019, p. 61).

Jenny's Story Taking the Long View of the Child By Patricia Carini and Margaret Himley

- “Trust in children as learners, from this commitment to building from each child’s strengths, and from this process of collaboration descriptive inquiry emerged, over time and with lots of revisions, what have become known as the Prospect Descriptive Review” (Carini & Himey, 2010, p. 2).
- “That, early on, Jenny appeared to some adults to be slow is *key* to her story. If the assumption that she was slow had taken root, it could easily have led to judgements that would have worked against her growth and learning” (Carini & Himley, 2010, p. 5).
- “For the school to do no harm. For each of us to be the equal of the other. For each child’s well-being to be valued as highly as we value our own or that of the child closest to our heart. For the child’s essential humanness to be the starting point for education. For the child to be the harbinger of human possibility. For the child’s dignity to be the school’s first responsibility and guiding principle” (Carini & Himley, 2010, p. 7).
- “I think this often happens when there is a breakdown – something small perhaps, like the Title I teacher’s judgment about Jenny’s *slowness*, or something bigger, like a school’s failing test scores – something that disrupts the everyday, that challenges the givenness of what we consider ‘normal’ or ‘the norm,’ and that offers a critical opening for reassessing the assumptions and practices that govern the norm” (Carini & Himley, 2010, p. 150).
- “That is what scares me – the ease with which we become agents of norms. The insidious and everyday ways that norms capture us, fasten us all too securely within them, squelch our aesthetic and ethical desire to be a certain kind of person, and cause us to disavow our capacity for finding our bass line and making a difference” (Carini & Himley, 2010, p. 151).
- “That desire, the human longing to make sense of the world and our own place within it, fuels a driving force in the world – a force with very real consequences for good or for ill. I am saying that it is a passion no less strong than other human passions. I am saying that we humans are philosophers by nature. Children are no exception” (Carini & Himley, 2010, p. 155).
- “By virtue of diligent observations and ways to reflect on what we saw; by trial and error, by making mistakes; by not giving up; by re-looking at our own efforts; by multiplying descriptions of children across time; by learning to take a child’s ‘works’ as seriously as we took the child, and so as worthy of close. Caring attention: and especially by increasing confidence in the power of process and looking itself – from this fertile ground evolved what are known as Prospect’s Descriptive Process” (Carini & Himley, 2010, p. 159).
- “Wasn’t it likely that what sent the child flying around the room was the intensity and persistence with which he poured himself into his work – an intensity that then erupted as pent-up feeling and random energy? That was, it seemed to her in the moment, not so much rage as need for an emotional release – an outlet for overwrought feeling” (Carini & Himley, 2010, p. 161).
- “What did noticeably change as a function of our changed perceptions was how the teacher and the rest of us appreciated Sean. We appreciated him for his determination and his passion to learn, to do, to create and for his insatiable hunger for stories. We appreciated him, too, for complex intermingling of passions channeled in abundant creative activity and sometimes so intensely felt they overwhelmed him” (Carini & Himley, 2010, p. 161).

From Another Angel Children's Strengths and School Standards by Margaret Himley and Patrcica Carini

- “Every parent knows how surroundings and time of day influence a child; so do fatigue or illness. Teachers are often aware that a child who is free and open outdoors on the playground may look less so in the confines of a classroom or even seem subdued or withdrawn. Also children (and adults) have favorite places to be and other strong preferences; for example, feelings about how quickly or slowly they want to start or end the day or an activity; how many people they want around and how much time they need to be alone; how long they can sit in one place and concentrate on the same thing and how much variety and change they can comfortably tolerate, and so forth” (Himley & Carini, 2000, p. 58).
- “In this kind of conventional educational arrangement, it was the child who was being inspected and assessed, and it was up to him or her to conform and measure up to the demands set by school in whatever terms the school set them” (Himley & Carini, 2000, p. 9).
- “What does it mean to speak descriptively and provisionally? It means to set aside heavily judgmental language and diagnostic or other categorizing labels such as “hyperactive” or “learning disabled” or “developmentally delayed.” The chair explains that no child is always moving or invisible or pestering or whatever – no matter how much it seems that way to the harried or concerned parent or teacher. She suggests that phrases like “it seems to me” or “from my perspective” leave room for the child to be other than what any of us might think” (Himley & Carini, 2000, p.14).

Languages of Learning Karen Gallas

- “By offering him access to the arts movement and enactment, I have been able to see Brian's strengths: how carefully he observes and analyzes every detail of the world around him, and how creatively he solves challenging problems. Those strengths are often obscured by his behavioral problems, but when Brian works through movement and drama, the behaviors that handicap him in other situations become his gifts” (Gallas, 1994, p.137-138).

Process Paper

The Art of Teaching was a very eye-opening experience for me and one I am extremely grateful for getting to take part in. With every new article or book that we were introduced to, I became enamored. These works proved to me that I had found my calling. I knew this was where I was supposed to be and what I needed to be doing, making a difference when others would have given up. It was this idea that led me to the discussion of labeling students and understanding just how these labels affected their relationship with education.

There was always a student who had been categorized by their behavior and these students would go on to suffer until someone else would intervene. There are times, however, that no one had the courage or ability to intervene, and these students would fall through the cracks. It is a disservice to these children if we do not stand up and advocate for their individualism and right to be who they are without judgement. It became apparent that it was up to us as educators to make the difference.

The idea of labeling students is one I have firsthand knowledge of; my brother has been labeled since the beginning of his educational career. I was not aware of the implications these labels would have on him for the rest of his life until entering the program. While I will not deny my brother is hard to handle, he has an abundant energy and fiery passion about him that if not careful will be put out. If you are looking at these behaviors as an extension of him rather than an emotion in need of an outlet, he would easily be a frustrating student in the classroom. That is exactly what happened to him. Within no time he was the “problem” student and would spend the rest of his academic career trying to overcome but with no avail. He would bounce from

classroom, to office, to detention until ultimately the decision to switch him to online schooling was made.

I knew this was a problem, but it was not until the Art of Teaching that I came to understand just how prevalent. I set out on this journey with a hope that I could find avenues to make sure these students would thrive within our classrooms. Understanding that these students would be displaced within the educational system if we do not make some changes. If we do not do better, we will have an epidemic. Students should be allowed to experience their world for who they are, educators should not be the ones stifling this zest for life.

Starting the research process left me digging deeply for answers to the most basic question. How do educators make sure all students are seen for the complex human beings they are and all they can offer? I wanted to find a way to make sure every student was seen for all of their strengths and we worked together on finding ways to advance their difficulties. Thanks to Patricia Carini and the Prospect Center I am armed with the tools necessary to see the child as a whole. The descriptive review was at the forefront of my research. I knew that going beyond the conventional educational system would be in the absolute best interest of the students. I was looking for ways to expand students' learning and create a community environment within the classroom. What I needed was evidence that this could be done. I was seeking a way to combine my ideas with real life application. With the help of many wonderful authors, I was able to find multiple avenues that would change the way educators see their students.

When the idea for my research had been cemented in place, I knew the most important sections would be my narratives. The most compelling evidence in my research are the stories from children who were unfairly labeled and thus began struggling with their education. I wanted to see the personal, the real, the heartbreaking because only in despair can we rebuild what we

thought we knew. Using the ideas taught to me throughout my time in the Art of Teaching program I knew I needed these students to be seen for their complexity. I dove headfirst into my research, knowing that this was a problem and we needed to have a better solution.

There was an underlying theme that kept appearing within the research and that was creating a cohesive classroom community. While I have always been aware of the importance of this issue, I had not pieced together the correlation. When even one student gets labeled, it turns the whole classroom on its head. For the student being labeled the safe friendly environment disappeared. It becomes an isolating vulnerable place with no sense of security. The students witnessing these labels became compliant, afraid, or unwilling to question the status quo. These labels teach students that their sense of dependability is contingent on the teacher's perception of them. The idea of community would ride on the power dynamic the teacher displayed. Teachers would barter their attention for conformity.

It became clear to me that I would do whatever necessary to make sure these students had the freedom to be who they are. I will trust their desires and emotions to be the driving force behind their educational journey. There will be no power hungry educator demanding compliance in return for being seen. There will be no outcasts, no "bad" students, no "troublemakers" within the four walls of my classroom. It was no longer just about hypothetical children, these children are our family, friends, and they will be the little faces in our classrooms. It is our duty to make sure we do not let these students fall through the crack. We must become the educators who create room for these students, who show compassion and understanding, and hold our colleges to a higher standard.

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