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Evangelyn Santana
Sarah Lawrence College

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RETHINKING POWER IN THE CLASSROOM

Evangelyn Santana

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Abstract

When the No Child Left Behind Act and then the Everyone Succeeds Act were signed into law, our educational system began to function on the notion that education is merely preparation for standardized tests. The high-stakes nature of standardized-tests has pushed the narrative that this form of education is what makes children “successful” in life. Under-performing schools are in jeopardy of losing funding and face the possibility of school closures. Our educational system tells teachers they must participate in the “banking model of education” to avoid the blame for the possibility of these repercussions. Paulo Freire describes it as the approach to educating that turns children into “containers,” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher. This approach tells teachers they must exert their power over students so “real learning” can happen. Amidst the fixation on preparation and conformity, we neglect to see the harmful effects these approaches have on children.

In this thesis, I am arguing that the rethinking of traditional power dynamics in the classroom is crucial in resisting the banking model of education that stifles creativity and wonder, and disempowers children. I will detail through my work that while changing a flawed system is not completely in our control, educators can make small and big changes to their perspective on educating and their roles as well as small and big changes to their practices in order to counteract its harmful effects. As I highlight the harmful effects of traditional power dynamics, I will include the experiences I’ve had in various classrooms, among different age groups, as research in expressing expressing the value of prioritizing time for children to tap into their natural creativity—free of adult judgment, the value of honoring children’s questions and wonders through active listening, talk, and inquiry, as well as the value of building meaningful relationships to create a classroom and society that respects children as active participants in their learning and as human beings.
Acknowledgments

I want to express my sincerest gratitude to my professors and mentors at Sarah Lawrence. I wouldn’t have been able to get this far without you all rooting for me in some way.

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To Sarah, Debi, and Tricia, you all have taught me so much about children and about myself. I feel so lucky to have had the privilege to work alongside all of you—to know you. Thank you for everything you’ve done for me.

Cassandra, I will forever be grateful I had the opportunity to work with you for an entire school year. For what could have been an extremely difficult year with us returning to life after lockdown, conducting a semester completely outdoors in response to the pandemic—the uncertainty of it all—you provided me and the children we worked with a year of joy and growth in its truest sense. You have profoundly helped shape the way in which I approach teaching and learning, the way I see joy in the classroom. It was your trust, your care, your dedication to doing right by children and community-building that brought me here. Thank you.

Denisha, I am undoubtedly grateful for the care you’ve shown me. Thank you for opening doors and plugging us into mountains of meaningful knowledge—for showing us that while our teaching journey will consist of a lot of difficulty, love will counteract that. Your willingness to always go the extra mile for us is something I will never forget.
Rue, as I think about my struggle with the “Sarah Lawrence ways” that challenged my long history with traditional schooling, I think of how you provided me with a safe space to think deeply and to think deeply out loud. The way you valued my work and my contributions to the classroom is something that has pushed me to do more. Thank you for being a thoughtful guide throughout these two years and for your dedication to getting us to this moment.

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Annotated Outline

Thesis Statement: I argue that it is necessary for educators to rethink and disrupt the traditional dynamics of power that exist in the classroom because this dynamic of power derives from the belief that students succeed through the “banking model of education;” an approach to educating that turns children into “containers” to be filled with knowledge by their teachers; thus stifling children’s innate creativity, wonder, and silencing children’s voices.

1. Introduction
   a. I will highlight the importance of empowering our students as learners and human beings and what this means for the traditional power dynamics that exist in the classroom. “There’s no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom” (Freire, 1972)
   b. The importance of this message to me “There is no vision without vulnerability” (Brown, 2018).
      i. My own schooling
      ii. Student-teaching in a progressive setting
      iii. My time at Sarah Lawrence College
   c. I will explore the implications of the banking system and how we as educators can challenge this system, how we counteract its harmful effects by shifting the traditional power dynamics.

2. Reasons for Traditional Power Roles
   a. No Child Left Behind and Everyone Succeeds Act
   b. Pressure to teach to the test, the banking model of education
   c. Conformity
   d. “In the banking concept of education knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know
"nothing" (Freire, 1972).

3. Clarifying Misconceptions

   a. Confronting our misconception with “powers” definition, the initial thoughts that often come with the conversation surrounding shared power in the classroom.

      i. Power and its bad reputation

      ii. Its relation to what society tells and shows us. Ex. Black Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter, fear of redistribution and failing to see that power can be plural

      iii. “What makes power dangerous is how it's used. “Power over” is driven by fear. Daring and transformative leaders share power with, empower people to, and inspire people to develop power within.” (Brown 2018)

      iv. Power is not a commodity or a zero-sum game. “Creating a space where kids feel safe means that we must create a space where we share power. One can let go of power without letting go of control.” (Minor, 2019).

4. Lessons from the Two’s

   a. What my time with two-years old has showed me is true of children

      i. They are innately curious, creative, observant, natural risk-takers, as well as willful in their yearning for autonomy

      ii. It is at this age that Erik Erikson says that “children begin to claim their power and control through leading play and other social interactions.” (Woolfolk, 1987).

   b. The need for power and ownership does not disappear in kindergarten, regardless of what kindergarden looks like today

5. What is at stake with this approach to education? And how do we shift the power dynamics to counteract these harmful effects?
a. Creativity

i. The lack of trust children have in their creative decisions because of the infrequency in opportunities to tap into creative thinking freely

ii. “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. Too often it isn’t. In many countries, formal education is mired in a dreary culture of testing and competition. That culture is now seeping down to early childhood education and risks stifling the nascent creative energies of the very young” (Resnick, 2017).

iii. Mamaroneck Avenue School, 5th grade - Maya

iv. “We are educating people out of their creative capacities... I believe this passionately, that we don't grow into creativity, we grow out of it. Or rather, we get educated out of it” (Robinson, 2006).

v. How do we use our power?

1. Exploring the art of knowing when to intervene and when to step-back as they are developing this perception of themselves as able, free of adult judgment

2. Valuing process over product, “Are our reactions helping the child to feel a sense of control over her life — or to constantly look to us for approval? Are they helping her to become more excited about what she’s doing in its own right — or turning it into something she just wants to get through in order to receive a pat on the head?” (Kohn, 2001).
b. Wonder and Curiosity

i. Study of curiosity & children’s questions in relation to their cognitive development

ii. Susan Engel’s study on curiosity

iii. Schools placing more importance on answers results in the more frequent use of the “stand-and-deliver” teaching model. This value placed on answers has forced children to forget the value of questions and wonder.

iv. How do we use our power?

1. Honor children’s questions and wonders

2. 5/6/7’s at the ECC – thinking deeply about numbers, journal writing, collaboration, negotiation all came about through a child’s wonder about the largest snowball ever made and a collective goal.

“The center of gravity is in the kids; their purposes and interests are our points of departure” (Kohn, 2015).

3. Teacher as co-learner

4. Active listening

5. Making children’s questions visible and making time to explore (Ex. Wonder Wall, project-based learning, child-led play)

v. 5th grader’s Wonder…

vi. “Of all the virtues related to intellectual functioning, the most passive is the virtue of knowing the right answer. Knowing the right answer requires no decisions, carries no risks, and makes no demands. It is automatic. It is thoughtless” (Duckworth, 1987).

c. Relationships and Empowered Learners
i. Lack of agency over children’s time—how they play and socialize makes connecting and relationship building difficult

ii. Schools prioritize compliance instead of connection.

iii. Children disengage or feel disempowered, resulting in labeling

iv. **How do use our power?**

1. Prioritize connection/relationships instead of compliance
2. Michael/King – 5th grade
3. Changing nature of relationships with our interactions
4. We see children for their strengths when we place more value on connections.
5. “*When we love children, we acknowledge by our every action that they are not property, that they have rights—that we respect and uphold their rights*” (hooks, 2000).

6. **Conclusion**

a. Call to action

i. Acknowledging the complexity of this work

ii. “*What we cannot imagine, cannot come into being*” (hooks, 2000).

iii. Children as theorists, children’s quotes. “*Children make the best theorists...they do not see why we might not do things differently*”

(Eagleton 1980, as cited in hooks, 1994).

1. What is to be learned from their imagining for bigger and better

iv. Small and big changes to our thinking and practices

b. “*But school shouldn't be preparation for life. For young people, it is life. Young people in America will spend well over a full decade of their lives in school, by law. Their daily life in school is their social and professional world. It isn't just*
preparation for it. They demand to matter in that world, every day. These children are saying, 'We are here now, to be seen.' For the people they already are, already full human beings, exactly as human as their teachers. No more, and no less. They have things to learn as citizens, and as scholars, and as family members, and they will grow and change and develop and learn. But they are already full human beings, and none of these lessons will make them more so. They already feel, and love, and hurt. They already desire to be entertained, engaged, and embraced. They already insist on being taken seriously, and cared for deeply. They will not be ignored, and they will not be invisible” (Shalaby, 2017).
The topic of power in the classroom and the importance of disrupting traditional power dynamics came about more thoroughly throughout my time as a student at Sarah Lawrence and my experiences as a student-teacher. However, it was something I have been thinking about as early as five-years prior to my thesis work. When I entered the world of progressive education, I had to continuously reflect on what my role, as a hopeful educator, would be for children. My own schooling had shown me that teachers were the sources of knowledge. I had always been in classrooms that were already fixed prior to the arrival of the children and expected these children to adapt to the inflexibility of the room. From the rules in place, to the lessons we were taught—children were to adapt, fall in line and quickly. So, inevitably, it was not out of the ordinary for me to lack the space to think critically, to think out loud, to negotiate, to wonder, to ask big questions—to feel empowered in my learning.

In my work with two to six-year-old children in a progressive setting, I saw learning in a vastly different way because these traditional power dynamics did not exist. Surely, the teachers still had control of the classroom but they were attentive to the needs of each child, willing to make changes in the materials, curriculum and functions of the classroom, willing to work on building a partnership, to support the children in the room so deep learning could take place. I was enamored by this loving, deliberate and empowering way of teaching and it has empowered me to not only be an active participant in an unlearning process of my own but express the importance of counteracting what traditional schooling tells teachers their roles are.

Working on my thesis was a liberating experience. In looking through old photos of children and reviving memories made in classrooms, I was reminded of the important and necessary work teachers do but also, how fearless and powerful children are—even when they are in constraining environments. The idea of shifting the power dynamics of the classroom disrupts the agenda of our current education’s system; achieving high-test scores, preparing students for
the workforce, prioritizing compliance so children are prepared to take their places in society. It is not difficult to see that our current education system's agenda is harmful to children, so the decision to challenge the banking model of education that enforces traditional power dynamics is an easy one for me. I refuse to stifle children’s innate creativity, I refuse to stifle their sense of wonder, I refuse to silence their voices and prioritize compliance over connection– I refuse to disempower them. It is my hope that my work with children will empower others to look at the roles teachers play differently, to look at children and childhood differently, to look at “success” differently in order to nourish children’s natural creativity and sense of wonder and to foster empowered learners and human-beings.
References


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Rethinking Power in the Classroom

Evangelyn Santana
Masters Thesis
May 2022
There is no vision without vulnerability.

Brené Brown

Beginning the discussion with vulnerability…
1. The idea I am bringing forward today is something I’ve been thinking about before my two-years in the art of teaching program. However, my time in the program has, undoubtedly, affirmed my thoughts and beliefs. About five years ago, I had entered the “world of progressive education” as a student-teacher from WCC. It was then that I began seriously reflecting on what my role, as a hopeful educator, would be one day.

2. My own schooling showed me that teachers were the main sources of knowledge.
   a. Little room to learn how to think out loud, to think critically, to negotiate, etc…
1. Struggle with the “Sarah Lawrence ways,” – thoughts followed by an unsureness of its importance

2. Student teaching in a progressive setting – In my work with two to six-year-old children in a progressive setting, I saw learning in a vastly different way because these traditional power dynamics did not exist. Surely, the teachers still had control–there was safety, there was a sense of structure and routine. But the teachers I worked with were attentive to the needs of each child individually and collectively, they were active listeners, willing to make changes in the materials, curriculum and functions of the classroom, willing to work on community, to support the children in the room so deep learning could take place. I was enamored by this loving, deliberate and empowering way of teaching and it has empowered me to express the importance of countering what traditional schooling tells teachers and children their roles are.
1. When No Child Left Behind and then the Everyone Succeeds Act came about, our educational system began to function on the notion that education is merely preparation for standardized tests.

2. Our educational system tells teachers they must participate in the banking model of education to avoid the blame for the possibility of these repercussions, the model that tells children to adapt and conform quickly. Paulo Freire says this form of education that is a delivery of content turns children into “containers,” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher. This approach tells teachers they must exert their power over students so “real learning” can happen.

3. We cannot dismiss the harmful effects of this approach and resistance
1. is rethinking the way we see and “do” power in the classroom.
Common Perceptions of Power

- Empowering one side only to oppress another
- Groups that fear the redistribution of power
- “Possession of control over something/someone”
- “Authority over another”
- “Power over”

1. The need to clarify the common misconceptions of power and its definition is important to the discussion
2. Society has given power a bad reputation, showing us the kind that spews beliefs and creates policies that empower one side only to oppress another. The fear of the redistribution of power that fuels racism. (Ex. Black Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter - people who cling to their power out of fear that there’s is being taken away rather than using their power to be co-conspirators.
3. How education sees power – teachers abilities are largely based on how much power they exert in the classroom, how well they can control students bodies and voices, but we call it “classroom management”
There is a fear that any redistribution of this power will threaten the school’s agenda to achieve high-test scores, prepare them for what has yet to come, dependency, conformity.
We may associate it with chaos, or we may have this visual image in our heads...We have been conditioned to believe that “power” can only mean “power over.”
“What makes power dangerous is how it’s used. “Power over” is driven by fear. Daring and transformative leaders share power with, empower people to, and inspire people to develop power within.”

Brené Brown

So the big moral question becomes: How will we use our power? Will we do what is done to us, onto our children? Do we keep hoping for different without doing different?
I argue that it is necessary for educators to rethink and disrupt the traditional dynamics of power that exist in the classroom because this dynamic of power is grounded in the belief that students succeed through the “banking model of education;” an approach to educating that stifles children's innate creativity, wonder, and silences children's voices.

1. Restate my argument
2. Clarify that the goal is not to blame teachers. Teachers are consistently facing the uncertainty of many uses of power in the classroom – ex. Administrators, district policies, state policies, textbook publishers, test developers. (Delpit, 1993)
3. Begin the thinking that can be transformative and liberating.
Let us refuse to stifle their creativity...
Let us refuse to diminish their curiosity…
Let us refuse to silence them...
1. Two-year-olds showed me what is true of all children. They are innately...
Creative
Observant
Daring
Determined
Imaginative
And willful in their yearning for power and ownership over their lives.
The need for power and ownership does not disappear in kindergarten, regardless of what kindergarten looks like today….Erik Erikson says that children begin to claim their power and control through leading play and other social interactions (Woolfolk, 1987).
The children who struggled to let go of their caregiver that morning may become the caregiver in their play.
This particular child had a hard time leaving her mom and what she had come to understand throughout her time in school is that whenever things were difficult without mom, teachers reached for her family picture that we always had in the room to comfort her. Here, we see she decided to switch roles—clearly her doll needed a lot of comfort at the doctor’s office and she became the person to bring comfort.
Instead, of the patient, they were doctors
... instead of being fed, they were doing the feeding
Or the cooking…
Instead of being to, they became the reader.
The need for power and ownership does not disappear in kindergarten, regardless of what kindergarten looks like today....

Why do we insist on inflicting this feeling of powerlessness onto children?

What are its other implications?
“Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transfers of information.”

Paulo Freire
What is at stake in passively submitting to the roles education has told us to play?  

What are the ways in which we can counteract the harmful effects of traditional power dynamics?
“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. Too often it isn’t. In many countries, formal education is mired in a dreary culture of testing and competition. That culture is now seeping down to early childhood education and risks stifling the nascent creative energies of the very young.”

Mitchel Resnick, Lifelong Kindergarten
1. During creative writing, Maya sought out validation from teachers constantly.

2. Insisted that she had “zero ideas,” asking if the names for her fictional characters were good.

3. When finally given freedom, many children will not know what to do with it.

4. Quoting Sir Ken Robinson: “We are educating people out of their creative capacities... I believe this passionately, that we don't grow into creativity, we grow out of it. Or rather, we get educated out of it.”

So how do we use our power?
The power of...supporting children as they are developing a perception of themselves as able...

Stepping back so they can step up, decentering ourselves so children can take center
1. The importance of valuing the process rather than product

2. Thinking about our responses when children ask us if we love their work

3. “Are our reactions helping the child to feel a sense of control over her life — or to constantly look to us for approval? Are they helping her to become more excited about what she’s doing in its own right — or turning it into something she just wants to get through in order to receive a pat on the head?” (Kohn, 2001)
Curiosity and Wonder

- A study on curiosity and children’s questions in relation to their cognitive development, 4 children over a span of 10 days.
  - 14 months to 5 years old – asked an average of 107 questions an hour
- Susan Engel’s study on curiosity
  - Looked into questions and expressions of curiosity over a period of several months “Open Pandora’s Box: Curiosity and Imagination in the Classroom”

1. A study done on children’s questions in relation to their cognitive development logged that children from 4 children from 14 months to 5 years old for 10 days at home showed that the children asked an average of 107 questions an hour. Another study performed in a classroom with the similar premise, logged that in children in an elementary-aged class asked between 2-5 questions within two hours and as the researcher spent time in upper elementary—the questions stopped altogether, with zero questions within a two-hour time period. (Chouinard, Harris & Maratsos, 2007).

2. Susan Engle’s study on curiosity showed that even
1. Kindergartners showed “almost no signs of curiosity” and only ask questions about rules or social dynamics.

2. What are the possible causes for these outcomes?

3. Children’s questions don’t fit into the scripted curriculum or lesson targets that teachers have been given.

4. Curiosity, and where it will lead, is a risk and obstacle in the way of school’s agenda and is actively being pushed out of the classroom to make room for the prioritization of answers—correct answers.

5. What do we do with our power?
The Power of Honoring Children’s Questions & Wonders

We can begin by honoring and valuing their curiosities and wonders. We can begin by demonstrating their questions are meaningful in the classroom, worth exploring.
1. A snowy day, a fascination with world-records, and curiosity were the beginning pieces of children collaborating to beat the record for the world’s largest snowball (32.94 ft circumference) which was made by Michigan Tech students.
1. Their teacher took them seriously in this endeavor.
2. Students tried multiple techniques in their work— they collaborated and negotiated different decisions resulting in a conversation about length and width, the roles each student would play, noticing the differences in the snow in different parts of the yard and which was best for the packing of snow.
1. The complexity of the way children were intrinsically motivated to think about numbers.
2. Measuring the circumference of the snowball they had built so far and determining how much bigger they needed to make it to beat the world record.
3. Determining that the yardstick was the best tool to use, using a number chart to guide them in figuring out how many times they needed to extend their measurement another 3 ft.
As children continued to work on this, it took hold of the classroom discussions, emerged the math curriculum and journal writing...
Although children didn’t beat the record, this experience was important—the experience that they worked on with their teacher started with the teacher giving a child’s wonderings weight in the classroom. It brought everyone in because of their collective interests, exposed them to a complex way of thinking about numbers and math but it was meaningful every step of the way...

This was not an irregular occurrence. Children were confident and empowered by their contributions to the classroom—in the way it functioned and its curriculum. This was possible because children entered this environment given the opportunity to formulate their own class values, choosing the kinds of jobs they needed in the classroom, frequent class discussions about disagreements or ways of the classroom, and as I described earlier—having their curiosities and questions taken seriously.
The center of gravity is in the kids; their purposes and interests are our points of departure. — Alfie Kohn

1. Acknowledging the uniqueness of this experience — the time outside and time overall.
   a. If this were a setting that believed that children’s answers in response to their teachers mattered more than children’s questions, the child who wondered about how to make the biggest snowball would have been told “We can talk about that later” because there may have been something “more pressing” to do.

2. If we hope for children to be empowered in their learning—intrinsically motivated—they need to know that their wonders and questions are worth exploring.

3. Uses of a “Wonder Wall” or “Wonder Books” serve this purpose to make their questioning visible and an important part of school and learning.

4. Accompanied by TIME for children to explore them (Ex. Project-based
1. learning and child-led play).
2. Curiosity needs to be something we actively guide and encourage, an educational goal. (Engel, 2006)
3. “The center of gravity is in the kids; their purposes and interests are our points of departure” (Kohn, 2015)
Breaking the Record for the Largest Snowball...at the ECC
5th graders share their wonders and questions…
Of all the virtues related to intellectual functioning, the most passive is the virtue of knowing the right answer. Knowing the right answer requires no decisions, carries no risks, and makes no demands. It is automatic. It is thoughtless.

-Eleanor Duckworth

(Duckworth, 1987).
What do we risks?
Connections and Knowing Our Students

1. It may seem obvious but in a model of education that silences student voice and fails to take into account student need for choice, we dismiss one of, if not the most, important pieces of the classroom – connections, relationships.

2. In the banking model of education, with teachers in total control, children often don’t have agency over their time—how they play—if they can play, how they socialize and engage in conversation—if they can. This makes connecting with children difficult because we don’t see who they are.

3. Unreasonable and often developmentally inappropriate expectations prioritize compliance over connection.

4. Children who oppose the kind of education that harms their personhood are often labeled.
1. First impressions of Michael
   a. What I knew and observed in the classroom: task avoidance, turning in blank work, breaking pencils during math, etc.
   b. Refused to call me by name when I arrived in his classroom
   c. Instead of demanding that he call me by my name, I asked what he liked to be called...
   d. Change in body language showed me so much...Michael told me he liked to be called King—changing the nature of relationships. Michael felt he was respected.
“When we love children, we acknowledge by our every action that they are not property, that they have rights—that we respect and uphold their rights.”

bell hooks

(hooks, 2000)

1. The importance of this first interaction with King is wholeheartedly comes with my life that if I had not expressed vulnerability towards King, if I would’ve handled that situation any differently, I wouldn’t have been able to form the connection that I did throughout my time in his 5th grade class. if I had exerted my power as a new adult in the room, I would have only seen King through the lens of difficult kid.

2. What I found out about him through the value of connection over compliance...King was loving, curious, and undoubtedly social—sharing with me his weekend plans, how his football games played out that past Sunday, his excitement for the football game approaching, his love for graphic novels and an anime aeries he always recommended I watched. He frequently asked
1. He asked me questions about myself and my family. He was an active participant in science talks and read-alouds.
As an assignment, teachers had students write a list of ways the adults in the room could take care of them as learners. King wrote:

“How to Take Care of Me by Yassan

1. Mask breaks, make sure we get mask breaks.
2. Let me wear my Akaski cloak to school. (An Akaski cloak is a cloak worn by one of his favorite anime characters and this anime series, I came to find out is about a young boy who seeks the respect and recognition of his village.)
3. Give me more time to get my work done.
4. Math is not my favorite subject, I like to work with a teacher.
5. Let’s do a lot of movement, like games.”
2. As schools have their expectations of students, their own demands and boundaries – children also have their own.
How will we use our power?

It is not a small ask to turn the dynamics of power in the classroom as we know it on its head. It is heavily embedded in our typical practices, our system, our society.

It is not a small ask to do in the classroom, what we don’t see outside of it… bell hooks says “What we cannot imagine, cannot come into being” (hooks, 2000).
How will we use our power to empower children to tap into their natural creative abilities?
Will we use our power to tell children what is worth exploring? Will we silence them?
Or will we empower our children to follow their curiosities and explore deeply?
Will we use our power to control the ways of the classroom entirely?
Or will we empower children to become decision-makers?
Will we use our power to be the only sources of knowledge in the room? 
Or will we use our power to make space for many experts?
Will we cling to our power out of fear?
Or will we use our power to listen to the needs of children?
Before my time student-teaching at the Mamaroneck Avenue School, the children gifted me a binder with their advice. They knew the next semester I’d be with kindergartners, and they each shared with me what they thought children need and gave me advice on how I can be the best teacher to these new kindergartners...

Another idea: Respect the kids and you will be the best teacher!

- Andres, 5th grade
1. Be a good listener. Get to know your students and show them that you care.
2. Make learning fun. Find creative ways to help students learn by playing games and connect learning to the real world.
3. Be patient.

- Matteo, 5th grade
It is great to always have someone who believes in you, or thinks your worth their attention. But the thing is, every kid deserves attention, and you should make sure they know that.

- Stella, 5th grade
Kindergartner’s Advice

“Let children do lots of arts and crafts.” - Ella

“Help them learn mistakes.” - Hannah

“Let them be who they want to be.” - Scout

Terry Eagelton says, “Children make the best theorists; they do not see why we might not do things differently.”

I truly believe we can learn from children in their imaginations for something bigger and better. There are small and big ways to challenge the practices and systems that disempower our students—some more than others. If we are willing to listen to children and truly hear them, to collaborate with children, to empower them and honor childhood and who children are as human beings—there is hope for changing the the way in which children experience school, the way they experience life, as well as the ways of the world.
“...School shouldn't be preparation for life. For young people, it is life. Young people in America will spend well over a full decade of their lives in school, by law. Their daily life in school is their social and professional world. It isn’t just preparation for it. They demand to matter in that world, every day. These children are saying, ‘We are here now, to be seen.’ For the people they already are, already full human beings, exactly as human as their teachers. No more, and no less. They have things to learn as citizens, and as scholars, and as family members, and they will grow and change and develop and learn. But they are already full human beings, and none of these lessons will make them more so. They already feel, and love, and hurt. They already desire to be entertained, and engaged, and embraced. They already insist on being taken seriously, and cared for deeply. They will not be ignored, and they will not be invisible.”

Carla Shalaby

Thank you!