This summer, I was invited to present to a cross-disciplinary group of U-M alumni about our progress in launching one of the greatest educational partnerships in the country right here in Detroit. During the question and answer portion, a guest commented: “That is the most innovative thing that I’ve seen from the university recently, and it’s out of the School of Education!”

Our faculty, staff, students, and alumni have been innovators since our founding nearly 100 years ago. Many will remember that the school’s former magazine, produced from 1969 to 2011, was called Innovator! We have always employed creativity to solve problems and generate better solutions. We have articulated and met the needs of educators and students. We have identified and disrupted systematic injustice. We are, and have always been, innovators.

Through innovation, we seek transformation. Innovation is at the heart of our collaborations, research, and teaching because we see such a need for it. In this issue of Michigan Education, we explore innovation in many forms, and yet we do not come close to exhausting the potential for innovative work to improve lives and society.

For example, Dr. Pat Herbst and Dr. Amanda Milewski have reimagined professional development to allow educators to virtually experiment with possible approaches to teaching mathematics. Their process, Story Circles, employs cartoons and storyboards to create an experimental and collaborative space for teachers. This story highlights both the researchers’ use of iterative design and the innovative work that teachers are able to do using the process.

Through a collaboration with The College Board, Dr. Michael Bastedo, Director of the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, is taking steps to ensure that college applicants are fairly assessed by admissions officers.

Bastedo helped to develop Landscape, a tool that provides context about the opportunities that applicants have—or do not have—in their communities and high schools. His ongoing research informs college admissions practices and strategies, and will reveal the role that Landscape plays in efforts of colleges to admit a diverse freshman class.

The newly launched TeachingWorks Resource Library supports teacher educators with free, high-quality curriculum materials. We follow the researchers and product designers through their use of the design thinking process to discover how they developed and refined the Resource Library and how it is being used.

As educators, we empower students to be innovators. Ninth graders at The School at Marygrove, which we opened this fall in partnership with the Detroit Public Schools Community District, are taking Introduction to Human Centered Design and Engineering at their new school in northwest Detroit. Taught by the first “resident” of the Teaching School, Ms. Sneha Rathi, the curriculum was co-developed with a team of graduate students, staff, and faculty from the SOE. Students in Rathi’s class are learning how they can use design thinking to address challenges or needs in their community. I am proud of these young students; our teacher education graduate, Sneha Rathi; our graduate students; and our faculty and staff who are working together to build and study innovative education opportunities. Their work gives us all hope and inspiration.

We also began work with the first cohort of Dow Innovation Teacher Fellows this summer. When Dow established the Andrew N. Liveris Innovation Institute—a collaboration to provide Saginaw Bay-area educators with the professional development and support to lead students in creative approaches to sustainability—we were eager to partner. This is another excellent example of how innovative educational experiences set up students to be imaginative, proactive problem-solvers.

Another initiative, now entering its fifth year, is Equitable Futures. The project has engaged over 2,000 Detroit-area students and 40 teachers in an innovative five-week study of social justice and inequality. Recently, the Equitable Futures team partnered with students in the Stamps School’s Master of Design program to introduce youth to forms of media that are used for social activism, such as zines and social media platforms.

Our work focuses on the growth of our own students as well as the growth of others, because we know that we must offer the highest quality and most innovative opportunities for our future education leaders. For example, Dr. Maisie Gholson organized a three-day Race and Social Justice Institute, which offered SOE graduate students an opportunity to learn from—and with—early career scholars who take up issues of diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity in their research and teaching.

Finally, in this issue of Michigan Education, I am also excited to introduce a new member of our Educational Studies faculty and our newest innovator, Dr. Angela Calabrese Barton. Her scholarship in STEM education advances equity and justice. She brings with her many years of successful partnerships with communities, families, and educators, all focused on building and enacting engaging and generative STEM learning opportunities for children and youth.

As we continue to pursue educational innovation in its many forms, we also consider how we enable and encourage innovation in education practice, policy, and research. I am grateful to all who approach challenges in education with creativity, imagination, and a collaborative spirit. This issue of Michigan Education honors you and the contributions you make. Go innovators! Go Blue!
Dow Innovation Teacher Fellows
How an industry and education partnership empowers teachers and their students to solve sustainability challenges

A Great Lesson in Possibility
Race and Social Justice Institute supports doctoral students in learning about race, racialization, and racism within an educational context

Meet Professor Angela Calabrese Barton
Designing for the User
New TeachingWorks Resource Library offers teacher educators free curated curriculum materials

Painting a New Landscape
CSHPE leads the charge for more equitable college admissions processes

Designing the Future of STEM Education...and Educators

Virtual Experimentation
Cartoon avatars & storyboards give teachers the chance to explore their practice

Share the Problem Space
Students from the Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design collaborate to help local youth express their commitment to equity and inclusion

SOE Happenings

Champions for Education

Class Notes

The Back Page
Above The SOE Spring 2019 Commencement Celebration took place on Saturday, May 4, at Hill Auditorium.

Left John Beilein, the winningest coach in U-M basketball history, served the university from 2007–2019. He spoke at SOE’s spring commencement, sharing the stage with Dean Elizabeth Moje, Provost Martin A. Philbert, and other honored guests.
In a breakout session at the SOE Community Convocation, faculty, staff, and students discussed what it means to collaborate with cross-campus colleagues in exploring trauma-informed practices. Another group at the SOE Community Convocation brainstormed ways to extend the school’s ALDE efforts to serve the broader community.

James A. Kelly and Paul Dimond joined the presenters and judges who participated in this year’s James A. Kelly Learning Levers Prize competition. A Learning Lever is an interactive digital tool that helps students learn more effectively, while empowering them to assume more control over their learning.

The SOE hosted its annual Homecoming Tailgate on October 5. Sunshine, hot cider, and lawn games awaited alumni, students, faculty, and staff.
SecMAC students led middle school students on a field trip to the U-M Museum of Natural History in its new home in the Biological Science Building.

Above Dr. Susan Dynarski served as a witness at a May 9 hearing held by the U.S. House Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment. She contributed research-based findings and answered questions about the health of our current higher education system. Dynarski is a professor in the CSHPE and the Ford School of Public Policy.

Above The new P–20 educational campus is the result of an ambitious collaboration between organizations in southeast Michigan. The partners in this work were honored by Starfish Family Services at its annual Great Hearts Gala. President Mark Schlissel was joined by co-honorees from The Kresge Foundation, the Detroit Public Schools Community District, and Marygrove College.
Students and teachers from The School at Marygrove enjoyed a 2-day retreat on the U-M campus in August. The students toured campus, learned about planning for successful admission to college, developed teamwork skills at the Adventure Education Center ropes courses, and enjoyed common college experiences like eating and sleeping in the dorms.

During their visit to campus, students programmed TI-Innovator Rovers. U-M students walked them through the functions of the graphing calculators and then gave each small group of students the task of programming the rover to move around an area, coming as close as possible to the border without touching it.
When you invest in teachers, you invest in the future of our entire world.

That’s what Dow in Midland, Michigan is betting on. They know we don’t have centuries to address the environmental and societal issues facing our world; we don’t even have decades.

Dow, the University of Michigan, and Delta College are collaborating to develop an interdisciplinary innovation and education hub to inspire the workforce of tomorrow and create sustainable pathways that will have a positive impact on the environment and society.

Named to honor the legacy of Dow’s Chief Executive Officer upon his retirement in 2018, the Andrew N. Liveris Innovation Institute is a collaboration that will provide Saginaw Bay-area teachers with an immersive learning environment of focused programming in the areas of advanced manufacturing, sustainable innovation, and global citizenship. The SOE brings its expertise in curriculum design, program evaluation, and professional development to this partnership. The Center for Education Design, Evaluation, and Research (CEDER) specializes in these collaborations. “Dow’s investment in local teachers is a smart way to leverage a powerful community of professionals to further the company’s STEM, manufacturing, and sustainability commitment,” says SOE Dean Elizabeth Moje.

As part of the Innovation Institute, the partners welcomed the first cohort of Dow Innovation Teacher Fellows this summer into a program designed to develop robust, applicable, and educational experiences for Midland-area teachers and high school students. The teacher fellows are leading their students in approaches to solve real problems in their community related to sustainability.

The Fellows are reaching out to businesses and nonprofit organizations in their areas to form partnerships. Their students will then work in collaboration to solve a sustainability challenge that they have identified in their communities. Over the year, the Fellows will develop their teaching practice with one another while their students engage in their projects and prepare final presentations to stakeholders.

The professional development sessions this summer included contributions from experts from higher education, industry, and nonprofit organizations. “When this fellowship became a possibility,” says Teacher Fellow Luke Freeman, “I jumped on it as quick as I could. Because I knew that if universities and community partners showed some interest,
students would see that this isn’t just an idea their teacher came up with, this is something that people are interested in worldwide—keeping our environment clean, keeping it safe—and there is something we can do."

Jean Goodnow, President of Delta College, greeted the first class of Fellows during their kickoff gathering and professional development session in June. “I want to acknowledge you and your commitment. You are here as lifelong learners because you are committed to our profession and to inspiring young people. Thank you for being involved, and I look forward to the outcomes,” she said.

During the Fellows’ first professional development session, members of the group were charged with making evidence-based recommendations to Bay City about how to reduce environmental contamination after conducting a trash census and community map. First, the Fellows divided into small groups, each taking a small section of the city. They collected trash, measured it, and mapped the location and types of trash found. This example modeled how the Fellows could kick off a sustainability project with their students.

Bay City, situated on the sparkling Saginaw River, was picturesque on the sunny June day the teachers ventured out for their field research. Most people would say the city looked charming and clean, but the teachers collected pounds of trash in just minutes. The Saginaw Bay Watershed is the largest in Michigan and feeds into the Great Lakes Basin, which contains 20 percent of the world’s fresh water.

The fellowship encourages teachers and their students to recognize the connection between their communities and the rest of the world. Students who have never left Midland have an impact—negative or positive—on our shared environment. The ultimate goal is to empower students to realize their own capability to contribute to solving vexing problems at any age and from anywhere in the world.

Katie Bryant is another Teacher Fellow. “The students want to know what they can do to impact the future,” she says, “and if we don’t teach them what to do now, then they are going to give up. So we have to catch them now while they have this desire to help the environment, and this program is going to help us teach our students how to do that.”

Andrew Liveris, former Dow CEO and the inspiration behind the initiative, addressed the teachers this summer about how approaches to sustainability have changed over time. He sees the partnership between industry, education, and nonprofits to be the way forward. He places great confidence in educators because of their role in inspiring the workforce of tomorrow and hopes to see youth engaged in their own communities through this program.

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Mike Witt, Corporate Director of Plastics Circular Economy at Dow, presented to the Fellows about how plastics are integral materials for an economy based on the continuing use of resources. Witt addressed the role plastic plays in ending hunger, improving health, and reducing negative environmental impact (since wood, metal, and glass have significant life cycle issues). He also stressed the importance of improving recovery of plastics through global waste management infrastructure, and shared several solutions that Dow has partnered on, including creating new building materials from recycled plastic and improving the quality of roads by mixing 10 percent recycled plastic with asphalt.

Fellows also met with Jonathan Jarosz, Executive Director of Heart of the Lakes, who discussed the social science behind sustainability: “Together with the community partners that you engage, your students have to tell a story.” Advocacy hinges on marketing strategies that connect with people. “Kids already know so much about media that they don’t know they know because they are so inundated by media,” he said. Jarosz helped teachers think about how they could build media literacy skills through the projects they design.

Nate Phipps, managing director of CEDER and program manager for the Dow Innovation Teacher Fellowship, looks forward to the continued growth of the fellowship over the next three years: “We’re so excited to launch a program that supports educators and their students in addressing issues of sustainability. These issues provide so many entry points and allow for a true interdisciplinary approach to solving these challenges. The feedback from our summer professional development has been extremely positive. It’s clear that these teachers are ready to jump into this work this school year and we’re ready to support them along the way.”
It’s clear why I invited these scholars here today,” said Dr. Maisie Gholson. “Their deep thinking inspires me and pushes me. It means a lot.” With these words, Gholson closed the public panel portion of the Race and Social Justice Institute she organized in August. The institute was a three-day workshop designed to support doctoral students in learning about race, racialization, and racism within an educational context. The institute also provided opportunities for attendees to meet and collaborate with other doctoral students and faculty.

Through keynote addresses and panel discussions from distinguished scholars as well as smaller interactive workshop sessions, attendees grappled with historical and contemporary manifestations of race in U.S. education and learned how scholars and researchers who are committed to social justice engage in rigorous research. For Gholson, this was an opportunity to follow the commitments in the SOE to diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity with the creation of a space in which these issues were central to the learners and instructors.

The Race and Social Justice Institute was designed to continue the legacy of the Race and Social Justice Symposium series originally started by Dr. Carla O’Connor, which was supported by the Faculty Allies Grant. “After a short hiatus last year, it was important to me to provide new and concentrated learning experiences that supported our current students and grounded our incoming students in the work of researching race and educational justice,” says Gholson. “We focused on history, land, and citizenship—issues that are front and center within the current political landscape. Looking back at the institute, I think we gained a deep appreciation for the contemporary struggles in pursuing educational justice.”

Kate Morman, a PhD student in the Combined Program in Education and Psychology, attended the institute. “There was love and commitment to social justice in education spaces folded into every presentation, talk, and panel,” she recalls. “It was so uplifting to be among scholars committed to social justice work in their research. I didn’t leave with all the answers, but I did leave more committed to engaging with the community of scholars who support social justice in education.”

The institute’s opening keynote speaker, Dr. Jarvis Givens, an assistant professor at Harvard University, discussed the history of Black education and its relevance to current education policy and practices. “The objectives of Black education always were, and continue to be, subversive,” he explained. Givens cited examples of this fact across time, explaining that the Black educational heritage was deeply affected by the laws and policies enforcing anti-Black exclusion and confinement. For example, anti-literacy laws were in effect for both enslaved and free Blacks, and the response to this control was “fugitive learning practices,” wherein Blacks would steal away at night to learn how to read. “It required subversive actions to educate oneself,” he explained.

Givens called on institute attendees to take this historical knowledge into modern times, to understand that “oppression was part and parcel of the Black American education system from the beginning,” and that “backstage performances of learning were unlike the more public performances that Black students and educators gave to show that they were meeting the societal status quo.” He suggested that all students of educational history should investigate narratives from Black students in addition to more typically researched public resources like classroom logs, textbooks, and teacher reports, if they want to understand the historical implications of modern education. “Current public education is now under attack,” he said, “and knowing that the job of teachers is subversive, we need to look to past models of subversive pedagogies to reveal truths in times like these.”
A panel discussion followed his presentation, shifting the conversation toward contemporary systems. The three guest panelists all investigate Black youth in the school context, with the underlying understanding that they research racialized, gendered, and politicized school structures led by officials who are mostly White and who continually grapple with the unfamiliar backgrounds of their students while guiding them through their period of growth. All three presenters spoke to attendees from the perspective of a different early career stage: candidate, dissertation fellow, and postdoctoral fellow.

Dr. Alaina Neal-Jackson (AM ’12, PhD ’18), a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Michigan and an Educational Studies alumna, presented research that combined education, sociology, and gender studies. She studied a high school for two years in which all of the teachers were White, but 60 percent of the students were Black. There, she said, “everyone was on edge because students weren’t achieving and teachers were worried about their jobs.” At the school, which is now closed, she investigated two questions: how were the ways that school leaders made sense of what it means to be a Black girl affecting their policymaking and norms of interaction? Secondly, how did the school’s responses to racialization and gendering structure its students’ experiences and opportunities?

She discovered that many teachers at the school made comments about Black girls’ lack of control, saying that they were volatile and unstable. She heard teachers use language about “blowing up” or “going off”—language associated with bombs and not people. Eventually, Neal-Jackson’s research about the teachers’ constructs of the girls’ identities led her to conclude that Black girls in that school were viewed as responsible for their own problems due to negative attitudes or lack of interest in following school rules. Their beliefs about the girls, she contends, prevented teachers, administrators, and staff from considering the effects of their own biases or actions. The situation at the school mirrored the nationwide trend in which 90 percent of students referred for behavior problems are Black girls who have been held disproportionately responsible for behavior problems.

“These narratives deny them the status of adolescence,” said Neal-Jackson, “wherein they are no longer considered vulnerable or in need of protection like other girls in the school. It’s obvious that there is a need to shift the narrative about who these girls are and who they are being. I have a Black child. She’s going to be another Black girl in a desk soon. And we need to find ways to give Black girls every opportunity that they need and that they are owed.”

As a doctoral candidate in the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, attendee Kamaria Porter says that hearing from many Black women scholars was a highlight of the institute, as was “seeing their epistemology challenge the ways in which Black women’s oppression in education is still illegible.” Porter hopes that future scholarly conversations will continue to center on racial liberation while also critiquing past and present movements that are heteronormative or misogynistic. “Those three days got my mind right,” she adds.

Through keynote addresses and panel discussions from distinguished scholars as well as smaller interactive workshop sessions, attendees grappled with historical and contemporary manifestations of race in U.S. education and learned how scholars and researchers who are committed to social justice engage in rigorous research.
Adding to the research on the outcomes for Black students led by predominantly White educators, Dr. Kevin Clay, assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, and Spencer Dissertation Fellow, examined the concept that Black and Brown students ought to “rise above” their circumstances as change agents for political transformation. He spoke about the year he spent investigating how youth develop politically in relation to racism, inequality, and social change. He collected notes, interviews, and journal responses, as well as spending the year facilitating youth participatory action research with students taking part in an Upward Bound group.

Clay’s research aimed to relate student voices to the current sociopolitical climate, and he found that Black youths often hold multiple and sometimes contradictory views on inequality, individualism, power, and social change. He endeavored to illustrate why youth educators—and mentors who want to develop their critical awareness—should gain a clearer understanding of adolescents’ political socialization, which, he found, was perpetuating structural racism. In his research with the youth, he discovered that many adolescents felt that the barriers they experienced were typical, while also affirming their resolve and responsibility to overcome these barriers through personal effort.

The adult leaders in their Upward Bound program said the same thing. In short, both groups recognized the students’ struggle against structural inequality while emphasizing that it was imperative for the students to work to resolve these issues. Clay contended that this is a complex and possibly damaging attitude: “The concept that Black students can rise above their circumstances disregards the complexity of young people's political orientations and the competing discourses they are exposed to.”

Some of their challenges are caused by systemic issues like discrimination, poor schooling, underemployment, testing, and disproportionate incarceration, he explained. “The narrative that someone can defeat these on their own is dangerous, and it ignores the pain that Blacks are having to feel in the first place,” he said. “And by valorizing the exceptions who beat the odds, it looks like the people who do not beat the odds are lacking.”

For this reason, we need to encourage teachers and staff to embrace fugitive logic and fugitive discourse. This means that people who mentor adolescents should abandon any discourse that suggests Black folks’ mobility is a barometer of Black social progress. “It is imperative that those invested in young people’s critical awareness develop a more comprehensive understanding of youth political socialization,” he said. Otherwise, structural racism will continue.

Panelist Ari Brazier, a doctoral candidate at the University of Pittsburgh, explained that many scholars believe that the adulteration of Black children is common. “Childhood and its ideals are anti-Black, when you consider the typical definition of childhood as relating to innocence,” she said. The antidote, which is the subject of her research, is play. In her presentation, she called for educators to learn to identify when play is taking place, because “play can directly oppose the adultification process by redefining spaces in a way that is inclusive of all children.”

In particular, Brazier wanted to illuminate how play and joy can reflect the relationship between the racialized terms “ratchet” (a term for an uncouth woman that first appeared in hip hop) and “womanism” (a team referring to community-oriented Black feminism). She did this by researching Thomasville School in Atlanta and the surrounding community. She was especially curious about the ways in which the students took play breaks. “I wanted to push the limits of participatory research and expand the limits of community collaboration," she said.

“Play is reflective of the tension that children see in their lives,” she explained, mentioning the spectrum between “ratchet” and “womanism” as one such tension. “Play is agentive, and this is why we need to create solutions through play.” Her work disrupts critical theory with the goal to reposition Black and Brown children as community engagers and activists because play is a form of resistance. “It is a tool for liberation,” she said. “It is the foundation for the development of our bodies. It is through our connection with play that we restore our connection with our communities and each other.”

Monét Cooper, a doctoral student in the Joint Program in English and Education, explains that these sessions reminded her of the importance of scholarship that seeks to decolonize and create new spaces. “It allows us to think deeply and critically, necessities play and the arts, allows everyone a seat at the table, leads us to interrogate ourselves and the structures we are complicit in, ensures that all have an opportunity to learn, involves intergenerational collaboration, centers diversity, and is urgent and possible for us to do in the academy,” she says. “As a first-year doctoral student, this moment was key in allowing me to feel like the University of Michigan has space for me, my research, and the ideas I’m grappling with as a scholar.”

Reflecting on the institute, its topics, and its presenters, Gholson explains that she wanted the institute to be representative of the young scholars of color who are engaged in educational research that emphasizes race and social justice. “All too often,” she says, “academic talks showcase the giants in the field, but this often masks their journey—the hardship and the successes. I wanted our students to see examples of how this work begins, and how they need not wait to take on the big ideas and concerns about educational equity. I found the vibrancy of the invited young scholars to be a great lesson in possibility.”
Meet Professor Angela Calabrese Barton

A former chemistry teacher is passionate about helping teachers explore science instruction for social justice and youth civic engagement.

Dr. Angela Calabrese Barton joined the Educational Studies faculty this fall. The author of seven books, she brings expertise in university-community-school partnerships and a commitment to serving youth, teachers, and families in low-income urban communities.

Barton comes to the SOE from Michigan State University, where she was on the faculty for 13 years. She focuses on teaching and learning science, with an emphasis on critical justice, in classrooms, makerspaces, and community organizations. Through her work in both formal and informal educational contexts, Barton uses science education to help young people develop critical agency and civic engagement, especially around issues related to community and environmental sustainability. As a former chemistry teacher, she is passionate about helping teachers explore science instruction for social justice.

For over two decades, Barton has designed and taught after-school and community-based STEM in homeless shelters and community organizations across the U.S. She takes a critical and participatory design approach to all of her work, bringing in youth participants, parents, teachers, and community staff in collaborating on research and program design.

Barton is the author of seven books including *STEM-rich Maker Learning: Designing for Equity with Youth of Color and Teaching Science & Mathematics for Empowerment in Urban Settings*. She has served as a WT Grant Distinguished Fellow, and is a Fellow of the American Education Research Association. She is the former co-editor of the *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, and is currently co-editor of the *American Educational Research Journal*.

You often use storytelling to communicate about your research. You also use it with the teachers, students, and communities with whom you work. How have you found storytelling to be an effective means for communicating (and perhaps challenging and changing discourse) about science?

I use storytelling to communicate about my research for many reasons. I use critical and participatory ethnographies to better understand the cultural and political dimensions of teaching and learning. Stories give shape to cultural accounts of lived experience. They help me to situate analytic claims within historicized context. They also help me to critically position myself, the researcher, into the work.

I also use storytelling to counter the dominant research paradigms that dehumanize and disembodied youths’ experiences—especially youth of color—in schooling and in STEM. This is particularly important given that I work primarily with Black youth growing up in lower-income urban contexts. Not only have they historically not had a voice at the research table, but also, for too long, research has been done on and not with them. Despite their brilliance and agency that makes a difference in their communities and the world, their voices and experiences have been significantly silenced in educational research. I use storytelling to center and amplify the voices of the youth, families, and teachers with whom I work. In this light, I have sought to co-author with youth and teachers to support participants in authoring their own stories.

As a scholar and a teacher committed to working within and across public schools, community-based organizations, and disciplinary communities, I have devoted my career, in research and in practice, to addressing fundamental equity- and justice-related concerns faced by teachers and youth in formal/informal educational settings, with special attention to the challenges faced by youth and their teachers.
from historically marginalized communities. Using storytelling helps to surface the challenges youth and teachers face.

**You take a participatory design approach in your research. How has this shaped the projects and programs you have led?**

"Teachers care, but they don’t care about the community all the time. We go outside on our time, find places where we can do science or engineering for our communities. School doesn’t know how to do that. School doesn’t know that we do that. We need to tell our teachers how we do it. We got to help them."—Samuel, 14-year-old

This quote captures a central challenge in the ongoing quest for justice in teaching and learning. Thirty years of reform efforts notwithstanding, patterns of dominant discourses and practices have worked collectively, across scales of activity, to position youth from lower-income communities of color as missing, or out-of-place, socially, culturally, and academically, despite their embodied presence in classrooms. It is my stance that justice-oriented teaching is urgently needed to disrupt/restructure such regularities in practice. Youth want their teachers to value them as whole people with legitimate knowledge/practices that matter in their lives and communities, and which should matter in schools.

But how do we, as a field, get smarter about such justice-oriented approaches? The wisdom of the lives lived of youth, community members, and teachers is central to tackling this entrenched challenge. Thus, I take both a critical and participatory ethnographic approach to my work. I want to make sense of the cultural and political dimensions of teaching and learning while also foregrounding and making sense of inequalities from multiple perspectives.

One example of how this has played out in practice is in my National Science Foundation DRK-12 project (DRL 1502755, I-Engineering, 2015–2019, in collaboration with science educators and engineering faculty at MSU and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro). In this project, we have been working in "research + practice partnerships" to design teaching tools and materials—bringing teachers, youth, and researchers together in support of teaching engineering practices and the disciplinary core content in science in the middle grades. We use a "sustainable communities" framework as one way to support teachers and students in bridging classroom learning with local communities toward more expansive learning outcomes grounded in deep disciplinary knowledge. In our development work, we have engaged youth, teachers, and community educators in co-developing tools, resources, and materials for classroom practice, such as our tools that integrate community ethnography into engineering design as a way to better bridge school and community. We sought to engage this work initially in community settings because such settings are “youths’ turf”—a space where they have greater voice and freedom to voice and enact their ideas regarding justice-oriented education. We then moved these materials into classroom settings, working with teachers and youth to co-document how this supports teaching and learning, and more humanizing experiences in school science.
Science is in the media frequently, with some outlets discrediting and challenging scientists and scientific work while other outlets bemoan a trend toward anti-science in the U.S. We have noticed that youth have been absent from this dialogue. How does your research help to challenge and inform these debates?

The Next Generation Science Standards (2013) require science teachers to provide connected and meaningful engagement with science ideas and practices. These standards challenge educators to think about how the science curriculum matters to the current and future lives of all students in ways that connect to both potential career aspirations and their future experiences as citizens. Despite understanding that this is an important goal, little guidance is offered on how to shape what it means to be a citizen engaged in science-related concerns.

The middle school youth I’ve worked with have something to contribute to the conversation about becoming meaningfully engaged in STEM-related civic engagement through a term they coined: “science that matters.” Science that matters occurs when youth have opportunities to bridge their science knowledge/practices with a commitment to their community. As one of the youth, Caitlyn, expressed, “we talk about a lot of stuff in school, but we never consider how it matters here.” Instead of science presented as decontextualized from where they live and who they care about, science with a commitment to community involves using the knowledge and practices of science to make a difference through taking action upon a community-related phenomenon. This is more than grounding an investigation in an area of interest to youth, or a familiar place. It means youths’ experiences in their community are central to the investigation in ways that engage community members toward real and consequential action-taking on issues that matter.

Take, for example, how our partner teachers have engaged youth in engineering for sustainable communities to tackle issues that affect their classrooms, schools, and local communities. Youth have designed and built—in collaboration with community members—engineering solutions to local issues ranging from bathroom inequality and bullying to how to care for schools and communities in the face of invasive species and water inequality.

Youths’ views of science that matters holds potential to impact science learning experiences in classrooms, in ways that may help to promote STEM-agentic citizens. There is a growing consensus that simply learning enough science to decipher public debates on socioscientific issues will not make citizens better equipped to handle the complex and ill-structured problems these controversial issues present. The knowledge and experiences youth bring with them are powerful and legitimate resources for making sense of socioscientific issues. In science classrooms, integrating learning experiences with a commitment to community allows students to see how their voices and experiences matter and how they can take action based upon bridging their emerging science knowledge/abilities with their existing areas of expertise.

Is there a course or topic you are particularly excited to teach at the SOE?

I am currently teaching EDUC 645 Cultural Studies and Education, which is a course I have not taught before, but which covers topics very much related to my own research. The students in my class are critical, thoughtful, and push our conversations into places I had not imagined. I am really enjoying “teaching” this class! (I put teaching in quotes because I also believe I am a co-learner in this space with my students as we critically engage the literature and the world together through our different lived experiences.) I am also looking forward to teaching courses focused on critical and participatory qualitative research methods and design as well as critical perspectives on STEM learning, engagement, and civic participation. The students at the University of Michigan bring a wealth of experiences in the world that can, and do, enrich our understandings of justice-oriented education and civic engagement in STEM. Locally, we face many situations of injustice that require STEM engagement. One only has to consider the water crisis in Flint and Detroit to make sense of how urgent this challenge is. Nationally and globally, we face many socioscientific issues that affect people and communities differentially, such as climate change, quality food/water access, cloning, and pharmacogenetics/pharmacogenomics, among many others.

“The students at the University of Michigan bring a wealth of experiences in the world that can, and do, enrich our understandings of justice-oriented education and civic engagement in STEM.”
Almost 60 percent of educators in a recent EdWeek survey reported that workloads, day-to-day deadlines, and lack of funding are the three specific challenges that halt the processes of innovation in their schools and institutions. These barriers stand in opposition to the goals of the 91 percent of educators who personally believe that innovation is a priority in their work over the next year. The majority of educators surveyed said that, if money were no object, they would focus their attention on innovative curricula. To ease these challenges for educators of future teachers specifically, and to promote socially just pedagogy generally, TeachingWorks has created a new Resource Library.

By supporting teacher educators, the TeachingWorks Resource Library’s full units and other materials support the development of skillful classroom teaching that disrupts patterns of exclusion and injustice in classrooms. The site responds to the needs of educators by offering over 250 free, practice-based, and curated materials. They are designed for teacher educators who prepare teachers in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. The library offers ready-to-use lessons, activities, videos, observation tools, and other resources for studying and practicing the work of teaching.

Alyssa Brandon, communications coordinator at TeachingWorks, says that many teacher educators are committed to preparing new teachers in ways that integrate content knowledge, the development of skillful teaching practice, and deliberate attention to advancing justice. “Until now, these teacher educators often lacked the resources and support they need to engage in that work,” she explains. These resources were developed through collaboration between TeachingWorks, SOE faculty and staff, and teacher educators from across the country. The site officially launched in August.

Work on the Resource Library began in the fall of 2017, borrowing elements from the design thinking process. The purpose of design thinking is to clearly define a problem and create innovative and effective solutions. In the case of the TeachingWorks Resource Library, the team focused on piloting and gathering feedback to emphasize accessibility and intuitive design. In the fall of 2018, they launched their prototype—a beta version of the site. Since then, they have tested the website with teacher educators at both higher education-based and alternative teacher preparation programs all over the country. They also interviewed pilot users to gain feedback on the structure, usability, and adaptability of the site. As part of the design process, says Brandon, “TeachingWorks used all the feedback we received both internally and externally to further inform our design of the site.”

There has been an additional benefit for users of the Resource Library. Through working on curriculum with their various external partners, TeachingWorks staff noticed that the work on materials organically spurred collaboration and conversation among teacher educators nationally about how they’re using practice-based resources.
in their particular contexts. Working on—and in—practice-based curriculum materials has offered faculty a rare opportunity for collaboration and colleagueship across teacher educator preparation programs, since it is a shared context where teacher educators can work together on improving the preparation of beginning teachers.

“We are excited to learn more about how teacher educators adapt the tools and materials on the site to simulate the core tasks of teaching,” says Adina Lopatin, TeachingWorks Director of Resource Development. “We also hope that the resources will support programmatic efforts to integrate opportunities to practice across different courses.”

The resource library challenges the notion that preparing educators to understand content knowledge for teaching, to develop skill in teaching practice, and to work deliberately through their practice to advance justice in classrooms cannot be done holistically. In actuality, the resource library enables teacher educators to bring some of the elements of teaching that would typically be addressed in various separate courses—like methods, content knowledge, and theory—into a single course.

All the elements of great teaching (content knowledge, skillful practice, and attention to justice) are carefully integrated throughout its materials, with each curriculum unit containing a section emphasizing how each teaching practice can advance justice in classrooms.

All teacher educators and coaches who are interested in free resources on high-leverage practices, teacher education pedagogies, and P–12 subject materials can visit library.teachingworks.org.

What is Design Thinking?

Designers use the design thinking process to innovate a well-planned product or solution. This process is often not linear, since a test may cause designers to go back and redefine their needs, or a prototype may lead to additional ideation and brainstorming. The 5-stage model was created at Stanford University, and is used by individuals and firms to promote innovation.

**Empathize**
Gain insight about the problem you wish to conquer.

**Define**
Gather findings, determine patterns, and write a clear problem statement.

**Ideate**
Brainstorm to determine potential solutions.

**Prototype**
Create scaled-down version(s) of the product that address different aspects of the problem.

**Test**
Test the prototypes to see how well they handle the problem; redefine the problem or brainstorm more solutions.
Painting a New Landscape

CSHPE leads the charge for more equitable college admissions processes

Can college admissions officers evaluate applicants equitably without an accurate picture of students’ circumstances? Professor Michael Bastedo’s research helps to make college admissions processes more equitable by providing colleges with information that was previously unavailable in a standardized format. Based on his research, a dashboard-type tool called Landscape is currently being used in 150 colleges and universities to help admissions officers review applicants from a variety of social backgrounds in a fair manner.

Bastedo, who directs the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education (CSHPE), has been researching admissions practices at colleges and universities since 2010. He was particularly concerned about the effects of admissions practices on low-income students, who represent only about 4 percent of the enrollment at selective colleges. While studying two flagship public universities, he observed and participated in admissions training, in addition to interviewing 60 seasonal readers and admissions officers. Through this work, he developed research questions about whether cognitive biases might be affecting some students’ chances of getting into a college, and he proceeded to investigate this in more detail.

Bastedo was curious about a specific concept in social science. It’s called “correspondence bias,” and it can lead someone to believe that a person’s actions have to do with their personality or personal attributes, when in actuality, behaviors and choices are situational. “The correspondence bias is relevant to admissions,” explains Bastedo, “because holistic review is meant to consider someone’s achievements as they relate to their communities, families, high schools, and neighborhoods. If someone is falling into this bias, it is difficult to make good holistic decisions.”

Partnering with CSHPE alum Nicholas Bowman, Bastedo designed an experiment to test whether providing more robust data on one’s community and high school would alter admissions officers’ decisions, even when the application itself was unchanged. He posited that offering more community context could reduce correspondence bias, and thus increase the chances of admission for people from disadvantaged backgrounds into competitive universities. “In my experiments,” he says, “I found that admissions officers were about 25 percent more likely to admit a low-income applicant if they had better data on the applicant’s high school and community.”

In 2014, Bastedo read a paper written by a researcher at The College Board, and reached out to him via email. Through their subsequent correspondence, he learned that The College Board was asking similar questions about admissions practices. The College Board has vast data stores that are not traditionally accessible to academic researchers, as well as a network of admissions offices that could implement any new intervention. Their partnership with Bastedo began when he was invited to their headquarters in Washington, D.C. to present his own research. “My goal in giving that presentation,” he says, “was to communicate that there was only one organization that could improve the system, and it was them. They had both the research resources to provide data on all high schools as well as the relationships with the colleges that use their data.” Bastedo was officially asked to consult with The College Board as they determined how to move forward with creating a system to display this information in a user-friendly way. The result was Landscape.

While typical college applications include information about a student’s grades, test scores, and extracurricular activities, they do
not contain good measures of a student’s relative opportunities within their high school or neighborhood communities. Landscape’s dashboard attempts to paint a more well-rounded picture of an applicant by displaying basic high school data about a school’s locale—whether city, suburban, town, or rural—size, percentage of students on free/reduced lunch programs, and student Advanced Placement coursework opportunities. It also shows how an applicant’s SAT score compares to others attending the same high school.

These data points also include six neighborhood indicators that researchers say are related to educational outcomes. These include community-wide college attendance, household structure, median family income, housing stability (including rates of home ownership, vacancy rates, and housing turnover), education attainment levels, and the predicted probability of neighborhood crimes like robbery, homicide, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. The indicators are averaged and placed on a 1–100 percentile scale to provide a snapshot of the level of challenge in the community from which an applicant applies. A higher number indicates a greater level of challenge when it comes to educational opportunities and outcomes as compared to all other communities in Landscape. The data come from sources like the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Student Clearinghouse, and Location, Inc.

After its development, the new tool had to be piloted to measure its outcomes and ensure its usability. Bastedo is working with College Board researchers to evaluate several pilot phases. At one early pilot university, thousands of applicants were reviewed using an early version of Landscape, and there was a “large jump” in admissions officers’ admissions of underserved students. The university was already taking a holistic approach, so the tool simply allowed them to put the applicants’ communities in focus to allow for a clearer snapshot of an applicant’s background.

The team then expanded the pilot to eight schools, and found that these schools also admitted more low-income students, particularly those from “non-feeder high schools” that admissions officers did not know particularly well. They now have data on about 50 pilot schools that used Landscape in 2018–19. Bastedo says, “Preliminary results from that pilot group show about a three-point increase in the percentage of disadvantaged students who were admitted.”

The team continues to follow the work taking place in these schools. “It’s working well so far,” Bastedo adds. “We don’t expect to be able to move the needle in a huge way, but we hope it continues to go in the right direction.” A Michigan Daily article confirmed that the University of Michigan was one of the 50 initial universities to use this dashboard, and that it will continue to use

“In my experiments, I found that admissions officers were about 25 percent more likely to admit a low-income applicant if they had better data on the applicant’s high school and community.”

Landscape’s Three Categories of Information

High School Data
- Locale (e.g., Rural)
- Senior class size
- Percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch
- Average SAT scores at colleges attended
- AP participation and performance

Test Score Data
- Applicant’s test score compared to others from the same high school

High School and Neighborhood Indicators
- College attendance
- Household structure
- Median family income
- Housing stability
- Education levels
- Crime
Landscape in its admissions decision-making processes.

One essential attribute of Landscape is that it helps ensure consistent decision making. Admissions officers are not familiar with all schools, and there will be discrepancies between officers’ knowledge sets. In fact, research shows that admissions officers lack quality high school information for about 25 percent of all applications. The Landscape dashboard provides information that is both consistent and clear, so that admissions officers can fully consider what students achieve in the context of the places they live and learn. Landscape is not used to decide who gets in and who doesn’t. It only helps officers give more students from more places a fair look.

Their results suggest that an overview of contextualized information can “provide a meaningful benefit to both applicants and admissions staff,” as the team wrote. In short, since the dashboard information shifted admissions decisions, it enabled a more diverse student body to be admitted. Ultimately, he believes that this discussion should be led and reconstructed by admissions professionals, professional organizations, and the colleges they serve. Their combined efforts may be crucial to gaining an understanding about why there is still great stratification across higher education, and it may become a first step toward more consistent admissions practices that better serve our highest ideals for fair, just, and equitable access to selective colleges.

Landscape continues to expand. As of fall 2019, it has been provided for free to approximately 150 institutions, and plans are in place for it to become accessible to students, parents, and counselors next year. It is expected to be broadly available to colleges and universities by 2020. So far, over 90 percent of its users have reported that Landscape makes it easier to incorporate a student’s context during the application review process. “It is a huge improvement over the data that admissions officers had before,” Bastedo says, “and we’re seeing real effects on the admission of more low-income students. I’m really excited for the future of this work.”
On September 3, 2019, excitement was high on the soon-to-be-former campus of Marygrove College. Barely three months after the announcement that the 92-year-old college would close its doors at the end of 2019, the 53-acre campus on Detroit’s west side was brimming with new life. But instead of college students, dozens of teachers, administrators, and community members were on hand to welcome a new cohort of 120 ninth graders to their first day of school.

Through an innovative partnership with Marygrove, Detroit Public Schools Community District, the Kresge Foundation, and the University of Michigan School of Education, this historic campus is being transformed into a groundbreaking “cradle to career” education hub. Beginning with the ninth grade in 2019, the school will expand over the next several years to include a full, STEM-focused K–12 continuum, an early childhood center, and post-secondary education and career training opportunities.

Dubbed “The School at Marygrove” (TSM), this new Detroit Public School is also home to the Michigan Education Teaching School which, modeled after teaching hospitals, offers an innovative approach for preparing new teachers to become outstanding urban teaching professionals. Just as novice physicians learn under the watchful eye of attending physicians, new teachers will be supported in their initial years of teaching by veteran educators.

In the Teaching School, undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in SOE’s teacher education program (“interns”) learn to use inquiry-based and student-centered approaches by teaching alongside one another, as well as expert (“attending”) teachers and university-based teacher educators.
Once certified, interns are hired at TSM as first-, second-, and third-year certified “teaching residents,” during which time they will receive a full-time teacher’s salary from the district. As residents, they teach independently, but remain a part of an intergenerational team that includes expert teachers as supervisors and mentors, and undergraduate interns as mentees. After they complete their residency, they will apply for teaching positions in other schools, opening the residency positions to other newly graduated novices. This infrastructure will allow ongoing cycles of structural, pedagogical, and curricular innovation.

While there are a variety of curricula that exist for high school engineering courses, Darin Stockdill, the Instructional and Program Design Coordinator for SOE’s Center for Education Design, Evaluation, and Research and a member of the SOE team supporting curriculum design work at TSM, explained that “we decided not to purchase a curriculum. Available packages tend to be focused more toward students who don’t look like our Marygrove students. In other words, they are designed for white, middle-class males. We wanted to develop something that was more inclusive, and we wanted the opportunity to be able to build it in partnership with instructors.”

The new curriculum, which focuses on Human Centered Design (HCD) and design thinking, was developed by an SOE team led by graduate student Jacqueline Handley and research investigator Carolyn Giroux, and supported by Stockdill. Rathi has been working with the project team since June, when they helped her to "workshop" the curriculum before the beginning of the school year. The team will continue to provide support as Rathi makes the curriculum her own and as she gets to know her students.

“As taking on this type of process with youth, we try to do it in ways that are socially just and rooted in the community. This means engaging with, among other things, the inequities in previous designs, the histories of a place, and the needs of all stakeholders.”

As TSM’s first teaching resident, Sneha Rathi is taking on one of the school’s core courses: Introduction to Human Centered Design and Engineering. As a STEM-focused school, every ninth grader will take the course, which will serve as a foundation for the academic work they will do as they progress through twelfth grade. Rathi graduated from the SOE’s Secondary Teacher Education program with a major in biology and a minor in history. She also holds a BS in biology from U-M’s College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.
over the course of the year. Handley will also have an ongoing role in the classroom observing and assisting with the curriculum.

Handley explains that Human Centered Design “includes design areas such as user experience design, participatory or community design, and socially engaged design. HCD explores solutions that respond to the needs of humans, addressing concerns that humans identified or even created. In some ways, it operates counter to design initiatives that would emphasize advancing technology over human interest. In taking on this type of process with youth, we try to do it in ways that are socially just and rooted in the community. This means engaging with, among other things, the inequities in previous designs, the histories of a place, and the needs of all stakeholders.”

“This curriculum is also designed to integrate the skills and literacies that students come with,” Giroux notes. “Our goal is for the course to live at the crossroads of a standard engineering course and what the students themselves bring to the table.”

The development of the course was based on research on similar work (like the SOE’s Sensor’s in a Shoebox project) taking place in informal spaces, such as after-school and out-of-school programs. Because TSM is a new school inhabiting a temporary space until renovations on its permanent building are complete, the curriculum team felt that exploring design challenges within the students’ own school environment would offer compelling project challenges and fit within the school’s stated ethos of equipping its students to serve as the neighborhood’s (and city’s) next change agents while honoring the school’s theme: Leaders Designing Change.

Over the course of the school year, the class will take students through four design cycles:

- **Process design** – exploring and designing a process that makes the space more responsive to its students
- **Product design** – exploring how students can store, transport, and organize their belongings during school hours
- **Penultimate design** – a process- or product-oriented project, based on student work and interests situated within the school community
- **Capstone design** – a student-led project, potentially based on design problems presented by outside partners and stakeholders addressing student-raised interests or concerns in the school or surrounding community

Each design cycle explores design-based processes and unpacks the language and literacies of the engineering world. “It will be an exciting year,” Rathi says, “but there will definitely be challenges, which include figuring out exactly how to bring standard engineering processes—such as implementation and iteration—into the classroom, and determining what classroom norms and supports will need to change. This involves developing a certain comfort level for students (and teachers) with the reality of the design process, which includes outside demands, failure, and ambiguity.”
The average classroom teacher makes more than 1,500 decisions each day.

In the field of teacher education, there is growing interest in creating opportunities for teachers to examine and improve their daily decision-making processes, since they are the building blocks of an instructor’s teaching practice. This is usually done by studying practices of others and observing their own, discussing those practices, and attempting them in a new way. The overall goal with this type of professional development is to create opportunities for educators to retain and skillfully apply effective practices in their classrooms with each pedagogical decision they make throughout a school day.

Dr. Pat Herbst and Dr. Amanda Milewski, along with the GRIP Lab, have taken this concept a step further, knowing that technology can support engagement with practice-based pedagogies. For 15 years, Herbst and his associates have been refining digital tools to study teaching and support teacher growth as they reflect on, and experiment with, teaching practices.

With the goal of advancing mathematics education in particular, Herbst and Milewski developed a process called StoryCircles to build on and honor what teaching practitioners already know. The StoryCircles process allows instructors to represent classroom scenarios by creating storyboards with cartoon avatars. Teachers use the cartoons to script, visualize, and discuss mathematics lessons in a shared digital format. The frame-by-frame storyboards they create through StoryCircles make it possible to show interactive details and event timelines in a classroom. This can include the physical locations of events taking place in a room as well as the language they use in class. Storyboarding, by its nature, enables teachers to maintain a laser-like focus on teaching practices while also enabling them to script other possible methods for approaching a lesson.

Herbst's GRIP Lab (along with Dan Chazan and his colleagues at the University of Maryland) have been using simple and non-descript cartoon representation since 2005, relying on a cast of cartoon characters to “play out” what has happened or could happen in a classroom scenario. The granularity of the storyboarding process—that is, the ability to lay out a classroom event scene by scene—allows for valuable specificity. "Distinct from a lesson plan, where teachers say what they would do but cannot show it happening," Milewski says, “the StoryCircles process allows teachers to demonstrate for one another exactly how they would do something. The granularity of the storyboard isn’t so detailed, though, that it would make an instructor feel uncomfortable or exposed.”

Usually, discussions of teaching practices privilege more abstract descriptions of practice or overly detailed video recordings of practice. Herbst, Milewski, and their associates have found that the combination of visual and verbal representations in storyboards can accurately expose tacit or nonverbal issues for the sake of shared discussion, whether the conversation is about actual happenings or predicted ones. The creation of the storyboards—and the group conversation that follows that creation—leads to teacher collaboration and discussion about the varied approaches to teaching a given topic. In all cases, a StoryCircles group creates a common artifact through this social process. Laid out on a storyboard, a scenario is easily discussed by teachers who can consider multiple pedagogical moves and outcomes.

Herbst and Milewski note that the digital format of the storyboards allows practitioners to share knowledge with one another and helps them to focus specifically on incremental changes. Few other teacher professional development processes take into account these incremental improvements, tending to focus on larger predicaments of practice that make practical changes difficult.
American practitioners rarely experience professional development in which teachers discuss the meaning of a piece of student work or consider the actions that could be taken in class. "StoryCircles tries to break this isolation," says Herbst, noting that the artifact of the storyboard represents knowledge that can be "shared, challenged, bolstered, refuted, and possibly also learned." He believes that, by increasing the chances for colleagues to summon what they know about instruction while they are together, they can expand their communal knowledge. With practitioners at the center of this model, their professional knowledge and ability to learn from one another is elevated. "We value what they know as opposed to valuing what they can learn from us," adds Herbst.

Among the 60 math teachers who have taken part in StoryCircles is Craig Huhn, a teacher at Holt High School. "Talking to other educators about how they imagine a lesson playing out, and seeing what decisions they would make, was informative to my own practice," he says. "Through these conversations, I considered alternatives and rationales that I may not have thought of, while being compelled to defend my own thinking and recognize my own commitments in math teaching. Having detailed conversations with other practitioners around a hypothetical lesson pushed the issue in ways that most other experiences never do. It certainly helped me frame my own philosophy."

Facilitators guide the StoryCircles process by steering practitioners like Huhn toward conversations that can aid in their growth. Facilitators push teachers past the surface level to engage with deeper ideas. Facilitators guide the StoryCircles process by steering practitioners like Huhn toward conversations that can aid in their growth. Facilitators push teachers past the surface level to engage with deeper ideas.

In future iterations of StoryCircles, facilitators will also introduce "playing cards" containing evidence-based scenarios into the process. These cards will contain events or situations that Herbst and Milewski have seen in classroom observations, and to which educators can respond through their storyboarding.

"One of the benefits of the cards is that they do not over-personalize the scenarios, which we have created based on our own classroom research," said Herbst. "We have a reservoir of evidence that we can draw from in order to say that ‘yes, this event on your card could indeed happen in a classroom’ and teachers can then create a storyboard to respond to the card in a way that represents the tactical knowledge of their practices. This work really crosses the divide between theory and practice.”

A mathematics consultant for Macomb Intermediate School District, Deborah Ferry asserts that these lessons are applicable across a range of school scenarios. “No matter what their situation is, urban or rural, teachers share many of the same struggles and need the support of others to find solutions,” says Ferry. “They learn new ways to engage their students with the concepts. The StoryCircles process provides them with a safe environment.” Ferry had previously led the writing of the Embracing Mathematics, Assessment, and Technology in High Schools (EMATHS) curriculum used in StoryCircles.

Current support from a James S. McDonnell Foundation grant is enabling the study of the ways in which StoryCircles supports teacher learning. StoryCircles particularly triumphs at blending professional development efforts from outside the classroom with teachers’ own experience and perspectives. It brings forth a middle-ground approach in which teachers actively experiment with new practices as they scrutinize and share their own classroom practices.

Using a reflective process similar to the testing and re-ideation process that occurs in design thinking, the team has made alterations to the StoryCircles process over time, including adjusting the software used to create the storyboards. “The more open we are to what practitioners say they need to represent, the more we need to adapt,” says Herbst. He and Milewski remain vigilant and curious about what new needs teachers will identify to help them improve StoryCircles.
We limit ourselves when we don’t invite others into our problem space.”

Darin Stockdill, instructional and program design coordinator for the Center for Education Design, Evaluation, and Research (CEDER), makes an elegantly simple argument in favor of opening up our work for greater collaboration.

When a cohort of students pursuing Master of Design degrees from Stamps approached Stockdill about collaborating on education projects, he proposed that they contribute their expertise to Equitable Futures, a curricular initiative based at Oakland Schools. Stockdill serves as a coordinating program lead on the work, and saw an opportunity for the design students to help the program communicate with a broader audience.

Equitable Futures engages local students in a five-week study of social justice and inequality, embedded in U.S. history and social studies courses. The Equitable Futures curriculum challenges students to explore the untold stories behind common educational narratives and directly connect outcomes of historical events to their own lives. In its fourth year, during the 2018–2019 school year, the program engaged 23 teachers and over 1,200 youth from nine schools in Oakland, Wayne, and Macomb counties.

The design students were eager to talk to educators and program leads about new directions in which to take the curriculum. The master’s students designed three workshops to encourage youth to tell their authentic stories, explore the study of spaces, and leverage marketing tactics to create social change.

The Zine
To start, the design students worked as a group to help Brandon Moss, a high school teacher at Arts Academy in the Woods in Frasier, Michigan, explore new ways to communicate the content of his social studies curriculum through interactive methods. The U-M students led a zine-making workshop to help Arts Academy students explore the future of civics using a low-resource method with roots in activist history.

Zines are independently published collections that may include poems, collages, stories, comics, photos, and other visual art forms. The zine format has been around for about 90 years, and has provided an important medium for communication and expression.

In their zine, the high school students expressed their thoughts on mental health, gender equality, race relations, violence, and the environment. Drawing on the work of local and national nonprofits, students used the zine medium to weave together words and images.
Mapping and Making Spaces
Two Master of Design students, Colleen Clark (MDes ’20) and Jennifer Low (MDes ’20), followed this preliminary work with a project at Fordson High School in Dearborn, Michigan. Clark and Low partnered with Fordson social studies teacher Angela Altomonte to explore concepts of belonging and equity with her students. Altomonte’s goal was to establish a culture of trust in her classrooms as a foundation for having honest discussions about complex topics.

Clark and Low turned their attention to how physical spaces encourage or discourage collaborative, inclusive learning. “By addressing the physical spaces of the student’s built environment, we felt that we could create the welcoming physiological space that Altomonte’s foundational work required,” Low says. One activity included rearranging classroom furniture into different configurations and asking students to react to the space.

Through a set of workshops, the class developed an emotional impact map to visualize zones where students felt safe to be themselves in spaces they commonly occupy like home, school, and locations in their communities. They considered why it is that some spaces foster inclusion, equity, and belonging. Based on their exploration of spaces, they developed theories around what designs and policies could make spaces in their school inclusive.

Ad Campaigns for the Common Good
A second team of design students, Gowri Saini Balasubramaniam (MDes ’20) and Megan Freund (MDes ’20), designed and facilitated workshops to engage students at Clarkston Junior High School in Clarkston, Michigan, in designing internet campaigns to radically imagine the future of the “common good.”

The young students were looking for a way to drive change beyond the classroom. They had ideas about the future they envisioned and questions about why adults aren’t working more urgently to bring about change. The ads gave students a real platform on which to share their messages.

According to Balasubramaniam, the workshop was intentional in ensuring the outcome resulted in online advertising campaigns. “The use of internet advertising campaigns aims to subvert the hyperpersonalized and persuasive messaging students are subject to online via targeted ads,” Balasubramaniam says. “We hope that these internet campaigns will have a wider reach to further motivate students’ continued participation in advocating for what they believe in.”

The students were excited to see the great reach of their ads. Their ads even drew the attention of the Institute for the Future—a nonprofit “futures thinking organization” in California—which invited the class to collaborate with them.

The Role of Design in Education
The suite of projects introduced new methods for inviting students to be more active in crafting their own educational experiences, which is fitting given the curriculum’s focus on empowering students to take agency in their communities.

According to Stockdill, working with design students introduced fresh skill sets into lesson planning, bringing into the mix new learning tools that encouraged students to think about how the study of spaces and marketing tactics play a role in creating social change.

“In many ways, the task of educating is framed in terms of content delivery. Students are the subject,” Stockdill says. “Through design approaches, educators have new ways to work with them as participants and collaborators. Schools and institutions aren’t structured to do these sort of explorations, but designers can see different opportunities.”
The SOE has continued its critical research, transformed teacher preparation, and launched truly innovative approaches to education because of generous philanthropic support. We are leaders among our peers when it comes to the amount of student support we award each year.

We can do this work because of the remarkable investments that our donors make in our people, in our work, and in the collective vision that we strive to realize. To those who have contributed valuable resources to our cause, thank you.

$1,877,262 was directed to Student Support

Gifts to the School of Education (fiscal year 2018–19)

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Want more?

Check your inbox or visit myumi.ch/soe-hailmail to sign up for SOE’s monthly HailMail newsletter.
Anonymous gift to the P–20 Teaching School Partnership Fund

An anonymous gift of $100,000 was pledged in support of the P–20 Teaching School Partnership Fund, also known as the “Angel Fund.” The donors shared their motivation for this gift, saying, “With several educators in our family, from pre-K to college, we value the importance of training the educators of the future. We are happy to support the SOE as they cultivate the next generation of teachers and professors.”

The Angel Fund was created to help support the emerging needs of the school in its startup phase. These needs include developing innovative and evidence-based curricula; recruiting; supporting and retaining teaching interns, residents, and teachers; conducting research and evaluation on outcomes in order to replicate best practices in other urban centers; providing support services and extracurricular experiences for children and youth; and aiding interns with transportation between Ann Arbor and Detroit.

Norma Herman Greene Scholarship

This scholarship was established by Leonard Greene to honor the memory of his wife Norma (ABEd ’59, TeachCert ’59) who spent 35 years as an educator, both in the classroom and in coordinator roles in New York City and New Jersey. In the remarks she prepared at her retirement celebration in 2000, Norma Greene reflected on her students: “I always taught up to them, and so many of them rose to the challenge. I guess it’s those challenges and those people I shall miss the most.” This scholarship will provide need-based support to undergraduate teacher education students.

The Heid Educators Abroad Endowed Fund

Ralph Heid (AB ’70) and Mary Lynn Heid, of Charlevoix, Michigan, have established a fund to provide support for undergraduate students in the SOE who may not otherwise be able to pursue study abroad opportunities. While previously supporting study abroad elsewhere on campus, the Heids wanted to branch out into other schools so that more students could do so. In particular, they discovered that students in education and nursing had been less likely to study abroad, so this is where they made their specific endowments.

Edward and Susan Kleiman Family Education Scholarship

Edward (BSE ’68) and Susan (ABEd ’67, TeachCert ’67) Kleiman have created a fund to support elementary and secondary teacher education students, with a preference for funding undergraduates.

Lawrence B. Trygstad Endowed Scholarship

Established by alumnus Larry Trygstad (AB ’59, TeachCert ’59), the Lawrence B. Trygstad Endowed Scholarship is designed to support undergraduate and graduate students pursuing teacher certification in elementary or secondary education.

Trygstad spent the majority of his career practicing law, representing teacher unions. His involvement with education began as a student at U-M, when he was advised to take courses in the SOE and attain a teaching certificate. This led him to a teaching position in the Los Angeles Unified School District, where he taught for nine years before heading to law school. As a teacher, Trygstad saw how education could transform the lives of students who had few advantages, and he realized that education was the key to improving society. “I started a scholarship because I felt it was important to give to places, like the School of Education, where the students can really make a difference,” he said.

The son of a school board president, Trygstad learned to value education as a child. He also established a scholarship at his high school in Holton, Michigan. “When I graduated from high school, my father got to hand me my diploma. Instilling the value of an education was important to him as well,” he explained.
Alumna Rebecca Horvath’s charitable gift annuity secures opportunities for future educators

When Dr. Rebecca Horvath (BMus ’56, TeachCert ’56, AM ’62, PhD ’80) started her career as a music student at the University of Michigan, tuition for the School of Music was only $150 a semester. “But it was still more expensive than some other schools on campus!” she says. “For that reason, I was so grateful to have received scholarships that paid for my tuition in the music program, which is what I ended up teaching.” During her junior year, she earned a second scholarship that paid for fees while she worked in dormitories cleaning and serving food. She continued to take coursework with an eye toward becoming an educator, and eventually earned a doctoral degree, so those gifts made a great impact on her life—and, in turn, in the lives of her students.

After finishing her first degree, Horvath started her career teaching instrumental music in the Albion Public Schools. She then taught 6th grade in Birmingham before moving to Japan to the now-abandoned Tachikawa Air Force Base near Tokyo. There, she taught the 4th grade children of the military personnel stationed at the base.

Horvath’s scholarship gift to the SOE is inspired by the opportunities she was given, and by the field of education itself. “I happen to think that teaching is the finest profession and the most important one,” she says. “My mother was a teacher. I got my advanced degrees in the SOE. And teaching is a relevant skill for people in other professions. My brother was a chemical engineer, and even he had to teach people how to do things.”

After raising her children—both of whom attended U-M—she earned a PhD from the SOE, studying education and psychology. She spent the remainder of her career teaching psychology courses at Henry Ford Community College. Horvath particularly enjoyed teaching her students memory techniques and behavior modification strategies. “We had a maximum of 30 students in a class,” she says, “and I got to know them well.” She adds, “I really think that community colleges are doing an excellent job,” explaining that smaller classes and available support systems allow students to succeed, even if they have personal or family-related challenges at home.

Being “a frugal woman married to a frugal man,” Horvath and her late husband William saved and invested their money. By leveraging the university’s charitable gift annuity (CGA) program, they were able to turn their stocks into a gift to the SOE. Through the CGA program, donors receive a fixed amount each year for their entire lifetimes. The balance supports the work of the university, and donors often simultaneously qualify for tax benefits. The CGA option can also enable donors to receive a dependable income during retirement while supporting the SOE. Donors can also opt to release this income back to the university to fund more scholarships, which is what Horvath has done.

Horvath hopes that her gift will continue to create opportunities for students in the Educator Preparation Program. She wants the gift to help multiply what she loves most about teaching: “seeing people grow and expand while gaining a skill.” In particular, she envisions the award going to multiple students each year who may not otherwise be able to attend the university.

“I received this award during my pursuit of a master’s degree in Educational Studies and teacher certification in U-M’s ELMAC program. Her generous financial support allowed me to devote myself full time to my training as an elementary teacher. As I strive to make a positive impact on the lives of young people, Dr. Horvath’s gift has caused a ripple effect that will be felt for many years to come.” — Bryan P. (class of 2017)

“Receiving the Rebecca Horvath award kept me at U-M. I am so grateful for this award.” — Emma B. (class of 2020)

“Receiving the Dr. Rebecca S. Horvath Scholarship made things a lot less stressful, and it made it easier to just focus on my education instead of worrying so much about the financial burden that comes with it. I am extremely grateful to have received the award, and it helped encourage me to keep pushing.” — Alexandria G. (class of 2020)

“Receiving this award during my pursuit of a master’s degree in Educational Studies and teacher certification in U-M’s ELMAC program. Her generous financial support allowed me to devote myself full time to my training as an elementary teacher. As I strive to make a positive impact on the lives of young people, Dr. Horvath’s gift has caused a ripple effect that will be felt for many years to come.” — Bryan P. (class of 2017)
Champions for Education

Camaraderie and Community

Young alumni give back to the school that “gave them so much”

“When we were thinking about ways to give back, we had no hesitation in giving back to the School of Education,” say Andrew (BS ’07, PhD ’16) and Michelle (AM ’10, PhD ’16) Kwok, alumni of the Educational Studies doctoral program. Their recent gift to the SOE supports both the Fund for Excellence (the schoolwide annual fund) and the Educational Studies gift fund.

Now parents to Madelyn, 4, and Silas, 2, these young alumni met as cohort members in the Educational Studies program. A portion of their gift, in fact, supports Ed Studies get-togethers and collegial gatherings. “That appealed to us,” Michelle explained. “We met through Ed Studies at a get-together, and these gatherings were quite impactful as far as helping us form lifelong relationships while at U-M, and also meeting others in Ed Studies.”

Another portion of their gift supports students who encounter unexpected financial need during their degree programs. “We both personally know some colleagues who were able to tap into those funds,” she says, “which was very important to helping them graduate on time.”

The Kwoks both teach at Texas A&M University. Andrew is an assistant professor who studies classroom management for beginning teachers, especially in urban environments. Michelle is a clinical assistant professor who teaches educators how to use literacy within their content areas, knowing that literacy is social and culturally bound. She’s also interested in the ways that adolescents understand their literacy practices in various disciplines.

They both credit their early career success to the impactful mentorship they received from many Educational Studies faculty members. Andrew’s primary mentor, Matt Ronfeldt, was integral in helping him establish a career in research well beyond what he anticipated. “He did a great job in terms of professionally setting me up and giving me skills and tools. He was always checking in on me to make sure I was personally and mentally doing well, too. He took a very hands-on approach during my entire graduate program, making sure that I was prepared for academic life after graduation. He even prepared me for research that wasn’t even on my radar at first, which led to opportunities that I couldn’t have imagined, like my work here at Texas A&M. During my program, I didn’t realize the degree of impact that Matt’s mentorship would have, and I realize that I would not be where I am today without it, let alone have the expertise to be able to speak on contemporary issues.”

Michelle notes that the Literacy, Language, and Culture faculty supported her academic journey holistically. Her advisor for her master’s and doctoral program was Elizabeth Moje. “Elizabeth, while integral in helping me shape my overall views of literacy and the world, was also there to personally care for me during times of stress,” she says. “She set me up for success in academia, and I often think about how we learned invaluable skills and knowledge throughout the program, while also feeling personally cared for. As a junior faculty member who is just starting to mentor other students, I think about that a lot, and what it means for my current and future students. It’s great to have role models from U-M to help me think through that process.”

While the Kwoks have started their own family, their SOE family remains strong as well. “We just went to the wedding of someone who graduated from CSHPE, where we reunited with seven other Michigan families we met through the program. Even though we all have our own families, we still come together and stay in each other’s lives on an annual basis. This sort of community has gone well beyond the university,” Andrew says.

To celebrate their partnership, their scholarship, their mentors, and their community, Andrew says, “We are grateful to have had invaluable experiences and to carry on the work that’s being done in the School of Education. We are just honored to be able to give back to a program that’s given us so much.”
Mary Antieau Barhydt (AB ’60, TeachCert ’60, AM ’64) is pleased to announce that the third generation of her family just enrolled at the University of Michigan. It is her grandson, who is now a student in the College of Engineering.

Dr. Susan K. Barnes (ABEd ’90, TeachCert ’90, AM ’92) is faculty emerita, as of 2017, at James Madison University. She taught in the College of Education’s Department of Early, Elementary, and Reading Education.

Dr. Charles Garrett Chalfant (AM ’13, TeachCert ’13) received a doctor of education degree in education leadership from the College of William and Mary in May 2019. He has since accepted a principal position at Allen Elementary in Ann Arbor. Previously, he was a principal at a pre-K–8 school in Flat Rock, Michigan. He also spent five years with Washington, D.C. Public Schools as a kindergarten teacher, 5th grade teacher, instructional coach, and dean of students. A lot has happened in just six years!

Jennifer Evelyn Colby (MSI ’13, TeachCert ’13) has loved being a teacher librarian at Ann Arbor Public Schools’ Huron High School since the fall of 2014. Recently, she became the chair for District Library Services, working with the department, administration, and community to advocate for and promote a dynamic library department that supports students and staff.

Dr. Rosemary J. Perez (PhD ’14) is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs in the School of Education at Iowa State University. She was the recipient of the 2019 Iowa State University College of Human Sciences Early Achievement in Teaching Award.

Miles F. Southworth (BSEd ’60, TeachCert ’60) was a graduate of the Vocational and Industrial Education program. “There were only about seven of us in the program,” he recalls, “and Hugh Pierce was our advisor.”

Jeff Taylor (ABEd ’00, TeachCert ’00) was honored as the School of Education’s “Teacher of the Game” when the U-M Men’s Basketball team played Nebraska on February 28, 2019.
SecMAC alumna Dr. Korin Visocchi (AM ’05, TeachCert ’05) recently stepped into the role of Chief Learning Officer and Associate Head of School at Academy of the Sacred Heart in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. She is now overseeing the academic programs in all learning communities. Visocchi earned her PhD from Oakland University last summer, and completed a dissertation titled “Wholehearted leaders: The lived experiences of women leaders in Sacred Heart schools.” Visocchi uses her diverse set of skills in this new leadership position, including her knowledge and love of Sacred Heart education, as well as her instructional and curricular expertise.

After retiring from U-M’s Center for the Education of Women, Dr. Jean Waltman (PhD ’01) became involved with the Family Learning Institute (FLI), a nonprofit organization that provides free one-on-one reading tutoring for Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti area grade school children from economically challenged families who are performing below grade level. Now serving as board chair, Waltman invites the U-M community to learn more about FLI (familylearninginstitute.org) and to consider becoming tutors. By spending one afternoon hour per week throughout the school year, a volunteer can help a child gain both essential life skills and increased self-confidence. “It’s a great way to make a difference,” says Waltman.

Emeritus faculty member Dr. C. Philip (Phil) Kearney passed away on September 28. Kearney received his BA and MA degrees from the University of Portland (Oregon) in 1954 and 1960, respectively, and was awarded his PhD in 1967 from the University of Chicago. He served in a number of education leadership roles prior to joining the School of Education faculty. From 1967 to 1968, he served as assistant superintendent of the Orange Local School District in Cleveland and from 1968 to 1977 served as associate superintendent in various capacities for the Michigan Department of Education. From 1977 to 1980, he was associate director, and then deputy director, of the Institute for Educational Leadership at The George Washington University.

Kearney joined the SOE faculty as professor of education in 1980. He served in a variety of roles: he was chair of the Program in Educational Administration and Supervision; chair of the Division of Educational Foundations, Policy, and Administration; associate dean; and director of the Bureau of Accreditation and School Improvement Studies. In 1981, he became a research scientist in the Program in Urban, Technological, and Environmental Planning. He contributed to the school and the university in a number of ways, including his service to the Military Officer Education Committee, the U-M/Detroit Public Schools Collaborative, and the Faculty Associates Program. He retired from the University in 1998.

Kearney was a dedicated scholar and a wonderful teacher known for his talent in mentoring students and collaborating with them on research and publications. He will be remembered for his significant contributions to education as well as his sincere compassion.

William Glen Kring, 98, was the father of former SOE dean Karen Wixson and a donor to the School of Education. He died peacefully at home on September 10, 2019. Kring graduated from U-M in 1943, majoring in German and French. While at U-M, he was a rehearsal accompanist for the Men’s Glee Club and played chamber music at the Allenel Hotel, where he met a violinist who became his future wife, Sara (Sally) Titus.

After serving in the U.S. Army in WWII, he and Sally settled in California, where he pursued his education and career in music, graduating from the Los Angeles Conservatory and studying sacred music at the University of Southern California. While in California, Kring and Sally had their three girls, Karen, Debbie, and Katy. He worked as a church organist and music director throughout his life, in addition to touring as an accompanist and soloist and undertaking various other musical endeavors such as summer stock and community theater. After a tour as music director for Holiday on Ice, Kring moved his family to Long Island, New York, where he completed a master’s degree in conducting from SUNY Stony Brook and worked as an organist and music director, most notably at St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church in Massapequa, New York, where he served for 30 years.

After retirement, Kring returned to Ann Arbor, where he attended concerts and productions of the University Musical Society, Ann Arbor Symphony, Detroit Symphony, and Detroit Opera. Kring was a world traveler who was fluent in multiple languages and loved visiting new places. He was a strong believer in “giving back.” In 2002, while daughter Karen Wixson was serving as dean of the School of Education, Kring and Wixson established the William G. Kring Family Endowed Scholarship Fund to support students pursuing their teacher certification at the School of Education.

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Nancy Nebel Palmer (AM ’55) passed away in Grand Rapids, Michigan on August 1, 2019, at the age of 89. Palmer was a retired elementary school teacher who was born in Munising, Michigan and attended high school in Ann Arbor. In 1952, she was awarded a bachelor’s degree from Albion College, where she was a member of Delta Zeta sorority. She was awarded a master’s degree in special education from the SOE in 1955, where she was inducted into an educational honor society. She achieved elementary teaching certification in several states and also held an early childhood development certificate in Maryland.

During her teaching career, Palmer taught early elementary grades in public and private schools in Michigan, South Carolina, California, Maryland, and New Jersey, as she followed her husband Philip M. Palmer, a retired Navy Captain, during his career. While they were on assignment in the Philippines, she was a reader in local Philippine schools and led several charity projects. She was active in Navy Officers’ Wives Clubs, Bay View Woman’s Council, the Northern Michigan Panhellenic Association, Belleek International Collectors Society, and the organizer of several book discussion groups. A beloved wife, mother, and grandmother, Palmer will be missed by many.

Dr. Edward Jay Vander Velde Jr. (AB ’59, AM ’63, PhD ’72) passed away February 14, 2019. He was born July 1, 1937 in Royal Oak, Michigan to Edward J. and Priscilla A. (Mead) Vander Velde. Edward is survived by his beloved and devoted wife of 57 years, M. Jade (Miller) Vander Velde (ABEd ’62, TeachCert ’62).

He will forever be remembered for his love of family, the water, golf, popcorn, ice cream, cats (especially his frequent companion I.Q.), Dire Straits, Yo-Yo Ma, and all the hugs, smiles, love, and support he offered to those he loved. Vander Velde was a University of Michigan man: “GO BLUE!” through and through. He was a devoted lifelong fan of the Wolverines, the university’s wonderful libraries, and the Rackham Graduate School. He touched the lives of a wide variety of people during his many years of working and living overseas, from South and Southeast Asia, to East Africa, and finally making his way back to Grand Rapids, Michigan.

No matter where life took him, Vander Velde always found his way back to his love of academics and scholarship. This passion was reflected in the 20-plus years he spent devoted to being a professor of geography at various higher educational institutions including Michigan State University, Binghamton University–SUNY, Northeast Hill University (Fulbright Professor in Shillong, Meghalaya, India), University of Nairobi (Kenya), and Aquinas College (Grand Rapids). In addition to serving as a mentor to potential U-M students, Vander Velde served as a member of both the Grand Rapids U-M Alumni Scholarship Committee and the Grand Rapids Federation of University of Michigan Alumnae Clubs.

After a full teaching career, Vander Velde dived into his love for water by becoming an irrigation specialist, which allowed him to travel and live in many interesting places around the world. He and wife Jade spent eight years in Lahore, Pakistan working with the International Irrigation Management Institute and a year in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Afterwards, Vander Velde became an irrigation consultant to the World Bank, as well as to the governments of Guyana, Armenia, Indonesia, Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines.

Ed and Jade Vander Velde have been generous donors to the SOE, as well as other colleges and programs at U-M.
Great characters, Indigenous traditional knowledge, and literacy tools make Molly of Denali a hit with kids, parents, and critics (educators too!)

This summer, children met Molly, her dog Suki, and her friends Tooey and Trini as they fished, snowshoed, and raced canoes in their fictional Alaskan village of Qyah. Molly films videos to record their adventures in a vlog, and she helps her parents run a store called the Denali Trading Post.

In July, PBS KIDS launched Molly of Denali with the guidance of professor Nell K. Duke as informational text advisor. Produced by WGBH Boston and Atomic Cartoons in Vancouver, this animated series recounts the daily adventures of 10-year-old Alaska Native Molly Mabray, a Gwich’in/Koyukon/Dena’ina Athabascan girl, Molly is spunky and resourceful, and she is the title character of the first nationally distributed animated children’s series to feature a Native American and Alaska Native in a lead role.

Each episode guides children to interact with informational texts through multiple platforms; Molly of Denali resources also include interactive games and real-world activities. Episodes show Molly using informational texts like books, online resources, field guides, historical archives, traditional knowledge from elders, maps, charts, posters, photos, and more. “Informational texts are foundational to building literacy,” says Duke, who explains that texts are especially important for learning science and social studies. Outside of school, they are part of many workplaces and citizenship activities as well. “Research shows us that even young children can learn from and about informational texts if given the opportunity,” she adds.

As informational text advisor, Duke works with writers and producers to include opportunities for Molly of Denali characters to use informational texts. She also consults with the digital team to develop online games and resources to support children’s developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to informational text.

Duke is an expert in children’s use of informational texts to build literacy skills, and is a strong advocate for increased access and exposure to such materials. “PBS KIDS and its accompanying resources, such as educational video games, have tremendous potential to reach large numbers of children and their families across the country and beyond,” she says. “We have been fortunate that Molly of Denali has been quite popular so far. It has reached 15.3 million viewers, including 4 million children, on-air to-date.”

Molly of Denali includes Alaska Native voices in all aspects of the production, both on camera and behind the scenes. Every Indigenous character is voiced by an Indigenous actor, including the lead character of Molly, who is voiced by Alaska Native Sovereign Bill (Tlingit and Muckleshoot), Alaska Native screenwriters, producers, scriptwriters, singers, and interns are also part of bringing the series to life. The scope of Native inclusion in this program was hailed in The New York Times as “rarely seen in children’s television,” ushering in “a new standard for how TV producers handle specific cultural identities.”

Molly of Denali was developed as part of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and PBS Ready To Learn Initiative with funding from the U.S. Department of Education. Check it out: pbskids.org/molly

* Source: Nielsen NPOWER L+7, 7/15/19-9/8/19, PBS KIDS Reach, P2+, K2-11, 75% unif, 1+

The contents of Molly of Denali were developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. [PR/Award No. U295A150003 CFDA No. 84.295A]
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