

A Fellowship of Educators

The Heinemann Fellows are a carefully selected group of educators from all over the country who share a passion for teaching and a goal to improve the teaching profession. Over four hundred teachers applied during the 2018 application period, and after careful consideration and lengthy debate among the selection committee, eleven teachers were chosen to be part of the 2018-2020 cohort.

At the onset of the Fellowship, each educator presented the action research question they would work on during their two years of participation. You can read their research questions and their conclusions below.



Irene Castellón @MsBigCastle

Assistant Principal/History Teacher
Cristo Rey San José Jesuit High School
San José, CA

RESEARCH QUESTION: In what ways can a high school community support their first-generation, Latinx college-bound students as they prepare to navigate their first and second years in a four-year college setting?

I documented the strengths and challenges that first-generation Latinx students experience in college. My research led to the creation of an Alumni Success Team that provides tangible resources for high schools supporting first-generation college students. I came to recognize the cultural and community wealth that first-generation Latinx students contribute to college campuses.



Marian Dingle @dingleteach

Math Lab Specialist
Briar Vista Elementary School
Atlanta, GA

Research Question: What are the ways in which building positive cultural identity for children of color affect student self-efficacy, confidence, and performance in the elementary mathematics classroom, and the elementary classroom in general?

As an educator of mostly children of color, I sought to position current and historical cultural context alongside mathematics content. As higher expectations within the classroom community evolved, shifts in behavior and beliefs began. Despite the presence of systemic challenges, my students taught me that their brilliance and resilience came from an ancestral well that they can indeed access when they are allowed to do so.



Janelle W. Henderson @freyourheart

3rd Grade Teacher, Mill Creek Leadership Academy, Louisville, KY

Research Question: In what ways do culturally responsive practices impact Black boys' identity and perceptions of school in a third-grade classroom?

Through my action research, I documented how my own practices supported, invited, extended, and sometimes unintentionally triggered the needs of the Black boys my classroom serves. My question challenged me to start a book club centering Black boys and Black male authors and illustrators, known as the "Black Boy Joy Book Club". Moreover, I've discovered how an identity-driven classroom, watching the kids, and taking actions based on what I've learned from the kid-watching can make school a joyous and safe place for the lives of our youngest, most marginalized, and brilliant learners.



Julie Kwon Jee @mrsjjee

High School English Teacher
Arlington High School, LaGrangeville, NY

Research Question: How does a continuous exploration of identity via literature and personal reflection encourage students to become active participants in choosing the books they read both inside and outside their classrooms?

My 12th graders and I took a look at our summer reading lists and determined that the vast majority of the authors represented were white and male. We wanted to include authors of color, authors that identified as LGBTQ+, and disabled authors. Through independent reading journey projects and a book stack project, we successfully added titles by diverse authors across all grade levels. Currently, my students and I are planning to continue to center diverse voices and understand the importance of dismantling biases that narrow our view of literature.



Brian Melton @beezy_melt

English, Creative Writing, and Slam
Poetry Teacher
Glenbard North High School, Carol Stream, IL

Research Question: In what ways can a shift in focus from whole-class novels to music, art, and storytelling in the ELA classroom enable student self-expression and develop critical inquiry into the work of others?

My journey started after I realized that over 60% of the students in my classrooms were spending their days sleepwalking through what I deemed the "creative desert": a high school schedule that is devoid of any fine arts classes. What started as a deep dive into creativity quickly became a shift in the mindset of my English classroom. Through art and music, we were able to step outside of the texts we were reading and into a more authentic and creative approach to analysis, guided by critical theory and curiosity.



Nicole O'Donnell @steamlaunder
Instructional Coach
7-12 Language Arts and Social Studies
Fairbanks North Borough School District
Fairbanks, AK

Research Question: In what ways does implementing a lab classroom program improve classroom instruction and teacher engagement among secondary educators?

During my time as a Heinemann Fellow, I began an instructional coaching position with the goal of creating a lab classroom program for secondary teachers. After designing labs to empower teachers to explore elements of action research in their own classrooms, I found that offering teachers the autonomy to identify authentic questions about their own classroom practice and providing a non-evaluative environment for feedback among peers led to meaningful engagement with professional development. When they felt they were being listened to and supported, teachers took the pedagogical risks they had been wanting to try.



Minjung Pai @minfucious
Group 6 Head Teacher
Westland School
Los Angeles, CA

Research Question: In what ways can identity work impact teacher pedagogy?

I worked with two teachers as case studies. The first year was focused on personal work without explicitly going into classroom practices. I find that teachers can often use curriculum as a buffer from doing the crucial, hard internal work. We attended three different workshops regarding identity work, oppression, and racial justice, studied texts together, and met monthly. I also produced five podcasts speaking on the topic of identity work from different angles and points of entry.



David Rockower @dgrock
6th–8th Grade English Language Arts Teacher
The Delta Program
State College, PA

Research Question: In what ways does teacher vulnerability impact student learning experiences?

I examined how my willingness to be vulnerable in three specific dimensions of vulnerability—personal, relational, and dialogic—has impacted the learning experiences of my students. I've found that teacher vulnerability builds community, leads to more authentic student writing, and opens the door for courageous conversations. Patterns in my data collection reveal that embracing vulnerability builds trust, bolsters writing confidence, allows for more equitable student-teacher relationships, increases engagement, helps students understand adult fallibility, and encourages student voice.



Nina Sudnick @sudnicknina
4th Grade Math and Science Teacher
East/West Elementary School
Athens, OH

Research Question: What ways might middle grade (4th-6th grade) students' math agency deepen by writing about their learning or discoveries in math class?

During my research, I found that the middle grade mathematicians' agency and understanding appeared to deepen once they started to write about what they were doing. Their writing agency also increased once they had an opportunity to look over their written work. Students said things like "By looking at a journal, you can see what your past thinking was and use it to help figure out your new problem," and "This journal was helpful to me because it helped me rethink my strategies and fix my mistakes."



Islah Tauheed @izzieteaches
2nd Grade Teacher
P.S. 567 Linden Tree Elementary School
Bronx, NY

Research Question: In what ways can integrating social emotional learning into literacy instruction foster empathy among second grade elementary students?

Using topics that come up during class discussions, I was able to model how students can show empathy to one another. I selected read alouds that reflected issues in students' lives. We practiced empathy strategies by making text-to-self connections with the diverse characters in books, and these strategies were also practiced in a wide range of literacies, such as culturally relevant song lyrics, poems, and portraits. Students displayed evolution in their empathetic thinking through journal writing and conversation, and final demonstrations of growth were displayed in student surveys.



Julia Torres @juliaerin80
Language Arts Teacher and Librarian
Denver Public Schools
Denver, CO

Research Question: In what ways can educators/teacher librarians support secondary education students living in "book deserts" to construct, develop, and maintain their own reading identities?

During this action-research project, my students were encouraged to redefine the characteristics of a reader. As a community that has been underserved and marginalized, many of our students do not identify as readers. In order to reimagine the place that reading should have in their lives, we participated in book clubs, designed and administered surveys, and developed a collection of literature that was reflective of our culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse population. This ongoing work will support our most vulnerable students through praxis that is community centered and culturally responsive.

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